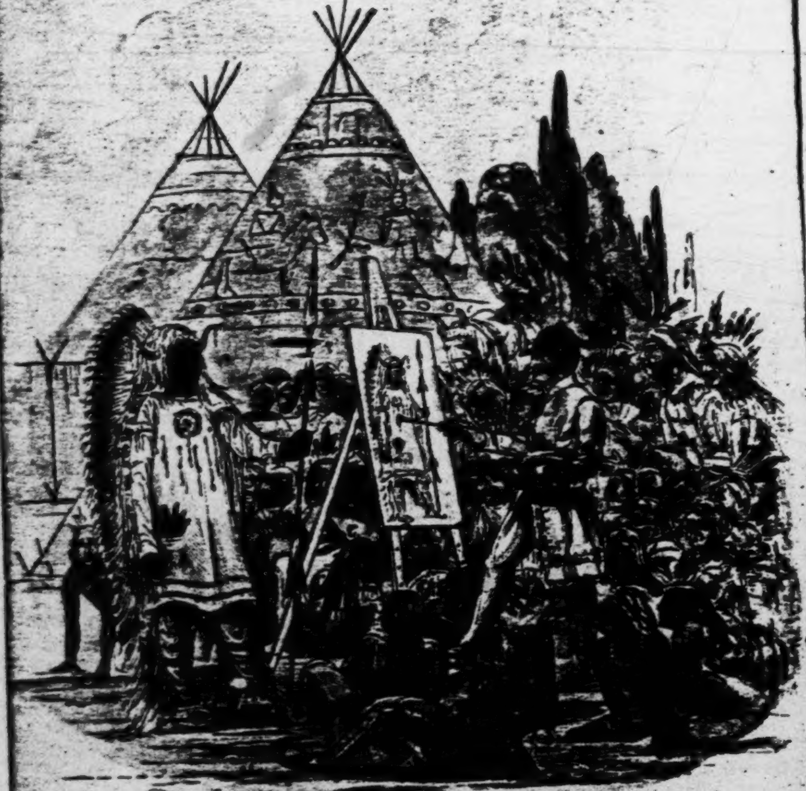
7: Catlin R, E-5 (1832-1840) 1857
NQ17 Mandan NQ17

000



The Author painting a Chief at the base of the Rocky Mountains

[spesific tribe pictured, unknown-- Analyst]

[frontispiece, facing p. i]

000

ILLUSTRATIONS

OF THE

MANNERS, CUSTOMS, AND CONDITION

OF THE

NORTH AMERICAN INDIANS:

WITH

LETTERS AND NOTES

WRITTEN DURING EIGHT YEARS OF TRAVEL AND ADVENTURE AMONG THE WILDEST AND MOST REMARKABLE TRIBES NOW EXISTING.

WITH THREE HUNDRED AND SIXTY ENGRAVINGS,
FROM THE
Author's Original Paintings.

BY GEO. CATLIN.

IN TWO VOLUMES.
VOL. I.

NINTH EDITION.

LONDON:
HENRY G. BOHN, YORK STREET, COVENT GARDEN.
1857.

[p. i] [p. ii contains no textual material]

CONTENTS

OF

THE FIRST VOLUME.

FRONTISPIECE:—*The Author painting a Chief in an Indian Village.*

MAP *of* INDIAN LOCALITIES *embraced within the Author's Travels.*

LETTER—No. 1.

Wyöming, birth-place of the Author, p. 2.—His former Profession—First cause of his Travels to the Indian Country—Delegation of Indians in Philadelphia—First start to the Far West, in 1832, p. 3.—Design of forming a National Gallery—Numbers of Tribes visited, and number of Paintings and other things collected, p. 4.—Probable extinction of the Indians, p. 5.—Former and present numbers of—The proper mode of approaching them, and estimating their character, p. 5—10.

CERTIFICATES *of Government Officers, Indian Agents and others, as to the fidelity of the Portraits and other Paintings*, p. 11—13.

LETTER—No. 2.

Mouth of Yellow Stone, p. 14, pl. 3.—Distance from St. Louis—Difficulties of the Missouri—Politeness of Mr. Chouteau and Major Sanford—Fur Company's Fort—Indian Epicures—New and true School for the Arts—Beautiful Models, p. 14—16.

LETTER—No. 3, MOUTH OF YELLOW STONE.

Character of Missouri River, p. 18, pl. 4.—Beautiful prairie shores, p. 19, pl. 5.—Picturesque clay bluffs, p. 19, pl. 6.—First appearance of a steamer at the Yellow Stone, and curious conjectures of the Indians about it, p. 20.—Fur Company's Establishment at the mouth of Yellow Stone—M'Kenzie—His table and politeness, p. 21.—Indian tribes in this vicinity, p. 22.

LETTER—No. 4, MOUTH OF YELLOW STONE.

Upper Missouri Indians—General character, p. 23.—Buffaloes—Description of, p. 24, pls. 7, 8.—Modes of killing them—Buffalo-hunt, p. 25.—Chardon's Leap, p. 26, pl. 9.—Wounded bull, p. 26 pl. 10.—Extraordinary feat of Mr. M'Kenzie, p. 27.—Return from the chase, p. 28.

000

LETTER—No. 5, Mouth of Yellow Stone.

Author's painting-room, and characters in it, p. 29.—Blackfoot chief, p. 29, pl. 11.—Other Blackfoot chiefs, and their costumes, p. 30.—Blackfoot woman and child, p. 30, pls. 12, 13.—Scalps, and objects for which taken—red pipes, and pipe-stone quarry, p. 31.—Blackfoot bows, shields, arrows and lances, p. 32, 33, pl. 18.—Several distinguished Blackfeet, p. 34, pls. 14, 15, 16, 17.

LETTER—No. 6, Mouth of Yellow Stone.

Medicines or mysteries—medicine-bag—origin of the word medicine, p. 35.—Mode of forming the medicine-bag, p. 36.—Value of the medicine-bag to the Indian, and materials for their construction, p. 37, pl. 18.—Blackfoot doctor or medicine-man—his mode of curing the sick, p. 39, pl. 19.—Different offices and importance of medicine-men, p. 41.

LETTER—No. 7, Mouth of Yellow Stone.

Crows and Blackfeet—General character and appearance, p. 42.—Killing and drying meat, p. 43, pl. 22.—Crow lodge or wigwam, p. 43, pl. 20.—Striking their tents and encampment moving, p. 44, pl. 21.—Mode of dressing and smoking skins, p. 45.—Crows—Beauty of their dresses—Horse-stealing or capturing—Reasons why they are called rogues and robbers of the first order, &c. p. 46.

LETTER—No. 8, Mouth of Yellow Stone.

Further remarks on the Crows—Extraordinary length of hair, p. 49.—Peculiarities of the Crow head, and several portraits, p. 50, pls. 24, 25, 26, 27.—Crow and Blackfeet women—Their modes of dressing and painting, p. 51.—Differences between the Crow and Blackfoot languages, p. 51.—Different bands—Different languages, and numbers of the Blackfeet, p. 52.—Knisteneaux—Assinneboins, and Ojibbeways, p. 53.—Assinneboins a part of the Sioux—Their mode of boiling meat, p. 54.—Pipe-dance, p. 55, pl. 32.—Wi-jun-jon (a chief) and wife, pls. 28, 29.—His visit to Washington, p. 56.—Dresses of women and children of the Assinneboins, p. 57, pl. 34.—Knisteneaux (or Crees)—character and numbers, and several portraits, p. 57, pls. 30, 31.—Ojibbeways—Chief and wife, p. 58, pls. 35, 36.

LETTER—No. 9, Mouth of Yellow Stone.

Contemplations of the Great Far West and its customs, p. 59.—Old acquaintance, p. 60.—March and effects of civilization, p. 60.—The "Far West"—The Author in search of it, p. 62.—Meeting with "Ba'tiste," a free trapper, p. 63, 64.

LETTER—No. 10, Mandan Village, Upper Missouri.

A strange place—Voyage from Mouth of Yellow Stone down the river to Mandans—Commencement—Leave M'Kenzie's Fort, p. 66.—Assinneboins encamped on the river Wi-jun-jon lecturing on the customs of white people—Mountain-sheep, p. 67.—

War-eagles—Grizzly bears, p. 68.—Clay bluffs, "brick-kilns," volcanic remains, p. 69. pls. 37, 38.—Red pumice stone—A wild stroll—Mountaineer's sleep, p. 70.—Grizzly bear and cubs—Courageous attack—Canoe robbed, p. 71.—Eating our meals on a pile of drift-wood—Encamping in the night—Voluptuous scene of wild flowers, buffalo bush and berries, p. 72.—Adventure after an elk—War-party discovered, p. 74—Magnificent scenery in the "Grand Détour"—Stupendous clay bluffs—Table land, p. 75. pl. 39.—Antelope shooting, p. 76, pl. 40.—"Grand Dome"—Prairie dogs—Village—Fruitless endeavours to shoot them, p. 77, pl. 42.—Pictured bluff and the Three Domes, p. 78, pls. 43, 44.—Arrival at the Mandan village, p. 79.

000

LETTER—No. 11, MANDAN VILLAGE.

Location—Village, p. 80, pl. 45.—Former locations, fortification of their village—Description of village and mode of constructing their wigwams, p. 81, 82.—Description of interior—Beds—Weapons—Family groups, p. 82, 83, pl. 46.—Indian garrulity—Jokes—Fire-side fun and story-telling, p. 84.—Causes of Indian taciturnity in civilized society, p. 85.

LETTER—No. 12, MANDAN VILLAGE.

Bird's-eye view of the village, p. 87, pl. 47.—The "big canoe"—Medicine-lodge—A strange medley, p. 88.—Mode of depositing the dead on scaffolds, p. 89.—Respect to the dead—Visiting the dead—Feeding the dead—Converse with the dead—Bones of the dead, p. 90, pl. 48.

LETTER—No. 13, MANDAN VILLAGE.

The wolf-chief—Head-chief of the tribe, p. 92, pl. 49.—Several portraits, p. 92, pls. 50, 51, 52, 53.—Personal appearance—Peculiarities—Complexion, p. 93.—"Cheveux gris, p. 94. —Hair of the men—Hair of the women, p. 95, pl. 54.—Bathing and swimming, p. 96.—Mode of swimming—Sudatories or vapour-baths, p. 97-8, pl. 71.

LETTER—No. 14, MANDAN VILLAGE.

Costumes of the Mandans—High value set upon them—Two horses for a head-dress—Made of war-eagles' quills and ermine, p. 100, 101.—Head-dresses with horns, p. 103 —A Jewish custom, p. 104.

LETTER—No. 15, MANDAN VILLAGE.

Astonishment of the Mandans at the operation of the Author's brush, p. 105.—The Author installed medicine or medicine-man, p. 106.—Crowds around the Author—Curiosity to see and to touch him, p. 107,—Superstitious fears for those who were painted, p. 108.—Objections raised to being painted, p. 109.—The Author's operations opposed by a Mandan doctor, or medicine-man, and how brought over, p. 110, pl. 55.

LETTER—No. 16, Mandan Village.

An Indian beau or dandy, p. 112.—A fruitless endeavour to paint one, p. 113.—Mah-to-toh-pa (the four bears), second chief of the tribe—The Author feasted in his wigwam. p. 114, pl. 62.—Viands of the feast, p. 115.—Pemican and marrow-fat—Mandan pottery —Robe presented, p. 116.

LETTER—No. 17, Mandan Village.

Polygamy—Reasons and excuses for it, p. 118.—Marriages, how contracted—Wives bought and sold, p. 120.—Paternal and filial affection—Virtue and modesty of women—Early marriages—Slavish lives and occupations of the Indian women, p. 121.—Pomme blanche—Dried meat—Caches—Modes of cooking, and times of eating—Attitudes in eating, p. 122.—Separation of males and females in eating—the Indians moderate eaters —Some exceptions, p. 123.—Curing meat in the sun, without smoke or salt—The wild Indians eat no salt, p. 124.

LETTER—No. 18. Mandan Village.

Indian dancing—"Buffalo dance," p. 127, pl. 56.—Discovery of buffaloes—Preparations for the chase—Start—A decoy—A retreat—Death and scalping, p. 129.

LETTER—No. 19, Mandan Village.

Sham fight and sham scalp dance of the Mandan boys, p. 131, pl. 57.—Game of Tchung-kee, p. 132, pl. 59.—Feasting—Fasting and sacrificing—White buffalo robe—Its value p. 133, pl. 47.—Rain makers and rain stoppers, p. 134.—Rain making, p. 135, pl. 58.— "The thunder boat"—The big double medicine, p. 140.

LETTER—No. 20, Mandan Village.

Mandan archery—"Game of the arrow," p. 141, pl. 60.—Wild horses—Horse-racing, p. 142, pl. 61.—Foot war-party in council, p. 143, pl. 63.

LETTER—No. 21, Mandan Village, Upper Missouri.

Mah-to-toh-pa, (the Four Bears)—His costume and his portrait, p. 145, pl. 64.—The robe of Mah-to-toh-pa, with all the battles of his life painted on it, p. 148, pl. 65.

LETTER—No. 22, Mandan Village.

Mandan religious ceremonies—Mandan religious creed, p. 156.—Three objects of the ceremony, p. 157.—Place of holding the ceremony—Big canoe—Season of commencing —and manner, p. 158.—Opening the medicine lodge—Sacrifices to the water, p. 159.—Fasting scene for four days and nights, p. 161, pl. 66.—Bei-lohck-nah-pick, (the bull dance), p. 164, pl. 67.—Pohk-hong (the cutting or torturing scene), p. 169, pl. 68.—

000

h-ke-nah-ka-nah-pick, (the last race) p. 173, pl. 69.—Extraordinary instances of cruelty in self-torture, p. 175.—Sacrificing to the water, p. 176.—Certificates of the Mandan ceremonies—Inferences drawn from these horrible cruelties, with traditions, p. 177.—Tradition of O-kee-hee-de (the Evil Spirit), p. 179.—Mandans can be civilized, p. 183.

LETTER—No. 23, MINATAREE VILLAGE.

Location and numbers—Origin, p. 185.—Principal village, pl. 70.—Vapour baths, pl. 71.—Old chief, Black Moccasin, p. 186, pl. 72.—Two portraits, man and woman, pls. 73, 74. Green corn dance, p. 189, pl. 75.

LETTER—No. 24, MINATAREE VILLAGE.

Crows, in the Minataree village, p. 191.—Crow chief on horseback, in full dress, p. 192, pl. 76.—Peculiarities of the Crows—Long hair—Semi-lunar faces, p. 193, pls. 77, 78.—Rats in the Minataree village, p. 195.—Crossing Knife River in "bull boat"—Swimming of Minataree girls, p. 196—Horse-racing—A banter—Riding a "naked horse," p. 197.—Grand buffalo surround, p. 199, pl. 79.—Cutting up and carrying in meat, p. 201.

LETTER—No. 25, LITTLE MANDAN VILLAGE, UPPER MISSOURI.

An Indian offering himself for a pillow, p. 203.—Portraits of Riccarees, p. 204, pls. 83, 84, 82, 81.—Riccaree village, p. 204, pl. 80.—Origin of the Mandans—Welsh colony—Expedition of Madoc, p. 206-7.

LETTER—No. 26, MOUTH OF TETON RIVER.

Sioux or (Dah-co-ta), p. 208.—Fort Pierre, pl. 85.—Mississippi and Missouri Sioux, p. 209.—Ha-wan-je-tah (chief) p. 211, pl. 86.—Puncahs, Shoo-de-ga-cha (chief) and wife, p. 212, pls. 87, 88.—Four wives taken at once, p. 213. pl. 90.—Portrait of one of the wives, p. 214, pl. 89.—Early marriages—Causes of, p. 215.

LETTER—No. 27, MOUTH OF TETON RIVER.

Custom of exposing the aged, p. 216.—A tedious march on foot, p. 218.—Level prairies—"Out of sight of land"—Mirage—Looming of the prairies, p. 218.—Turning the toes in—Bijou hills—Salt meadows, p. 219—Arrive at Fort Pierre—Great assemblage of Sioux—Paint the portrait of the chief—Superstitious objections—Opposed by the doctors, p. 220.—Difficulty settled—Death of Ha-wan-je-tah (the chief)—Mode of, p. 221.—Portraits of other Sioux chiefs—Wampum, p. 222-3, pls. 91, 92.—Beautiful Sioux women—Daughter of Black Rock—Chardon, his Indian wife, p. 224-5, pls. 94, 95.

LETTER—No. 28, MOUTH OF TETON RIVER.

Difficulty of painting Indian women, p. 226.—Indian vanity—Watching their portraits—Arrival of the first steamer amongst the Sioux, p. 227.—Dog-feast p. 228, pl. 96.

LETTER—No. 29, Mouth of Teton River.

Voluntary torture, "looking at the sun," p. 232, pl. 97.—Religious ceremony, p. 233.—Smoking "k'nick-k'neck"—Pipes, p. 234, pl. 98.—Calumets or pipes of peace, p. 235.—Tomahawks and scalping knives, p. 235-6, pl. 99.—Dance of the chiefs, p. 237, pl. 100.—Scalps—Mode of taking, and object, p. 238-9.—Modes of carrying and using the scalps, p. 240, pl. 101.

LETTER—No. 30, Mouth of Teton River.

Indian weapons and instruments of music, p. 241, pl. 101½.—Quiver and shield—Smoking the shield p. 241.—Tobacco pouches—Drums—Rattles—Whistles—Lutes, p. 242, pl 101½.—Bear dance, p. 244, pl. 102.—Beggars' dance—Scalp dance, p. 245, pls. 103, 104

LETTER—No. 31, Mouth of Teton River.

Bisons (or buffaloes) description of, p. 247.—Habits of, p. 248—Bulls' fighting—Buffalo wallows—Fairy circles, p. 249, pls. 105, 106.—Running the buffaloes, and throwing the arrow, p. 251, pl. 107.—Buffalo chase—Use of the laso, p. 253, pl. 108, 109.—Hunting under masque of white wolf skins, p. 254, pl. 110.—Horses destroyed in buffalo hunting, p. 255, pl. 111.—Buffalo calf—Mode of catching and bringing in, p. 255, pl. 112.—Immense and wanton destruction of buffaloes—1,400 killed, p. 256.—White wolves attacking buffaloes, p. 257-8, pls. 113, 114.—Contemplations on the probable extinction of buffaloes and Indians, p. 258, 264.

LETTERS AND NOTES

ON THE

NORTH AMERICAN INDIANS.

LETTER—No. 1

000 As the following pages have been hastily compiled, at the urgent request of a number of my friends, from a series of Letters and Notes written by myself during several years' residence and travel amongst a number of the wildest and most remote tribes of the North American Indians, I have thought it best to make this page the beginning of my book; dispensing with Preface, and even with Dedication, other than that which I hereby make of it, with all my heart, to those who will take the pains to read it.

If it be necessary to render any apology for beginning thus unceremoniously my readers will understand that I had no space in these, my first volumes, to throw away; nor much time at my disposal, which I could, in justice, use for introducing myself and my works to the world.

Having commenced thus abruptly then, I will venture to take upon myself the sin of calling this one of the series of Letters of which I have spoken; although I am writing it several years later, and placing it at the beginning of my book; by which means I will be enabled briefly to introduce myself to my readers (who, as yet, know little or nothing of me), and also the subjects of the following epistles, with such explanations of the customs described in them, as will serve for a key or glossary to the same, and prepare the reader's mind for the information they contain.

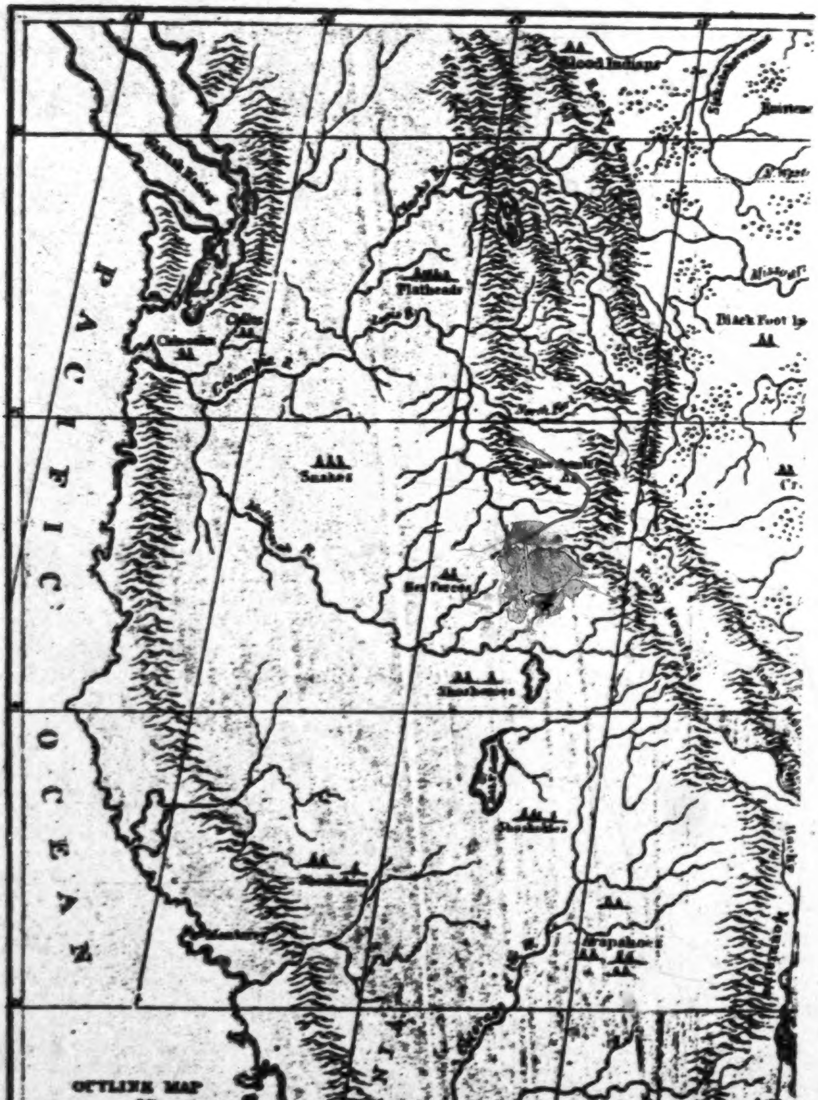
Amidst the multiplicity of books which are, in this enlightened age, flooding the world, I feel it my duty, as early as possible, to beg pardon for making a book at all; and in the next (if my readers should become so much interested in my narrations, as to censure me for the brevity of the work) to take some considerable credit for not having trespassed too long upon their time and patience.

Leaving my readers, therefore, to find out what is in the book, without
114 promising them anything, I proceed to say—of *myself*, that I was born in Wyöming, in North America, some thirty or forty years since, of parents

7: Catlin R, E-5 (1832-1840) 1857

NQ17 Mandan NQ17

102



Blood Indians
Flatheads
Black Foot Ins
PACIFIC OCEAN
Columbia R.
Snakes
Nez Perces
Shoshonees
Arapahoes
SINORA
MEX

OUTLINE MAP OF INDIAN LOCALITIES in 1833.

in Vol 2, see Map of *LOCALITIES in 1840* *since all the tribes have been removed from the States, W. of the Mississippi.*

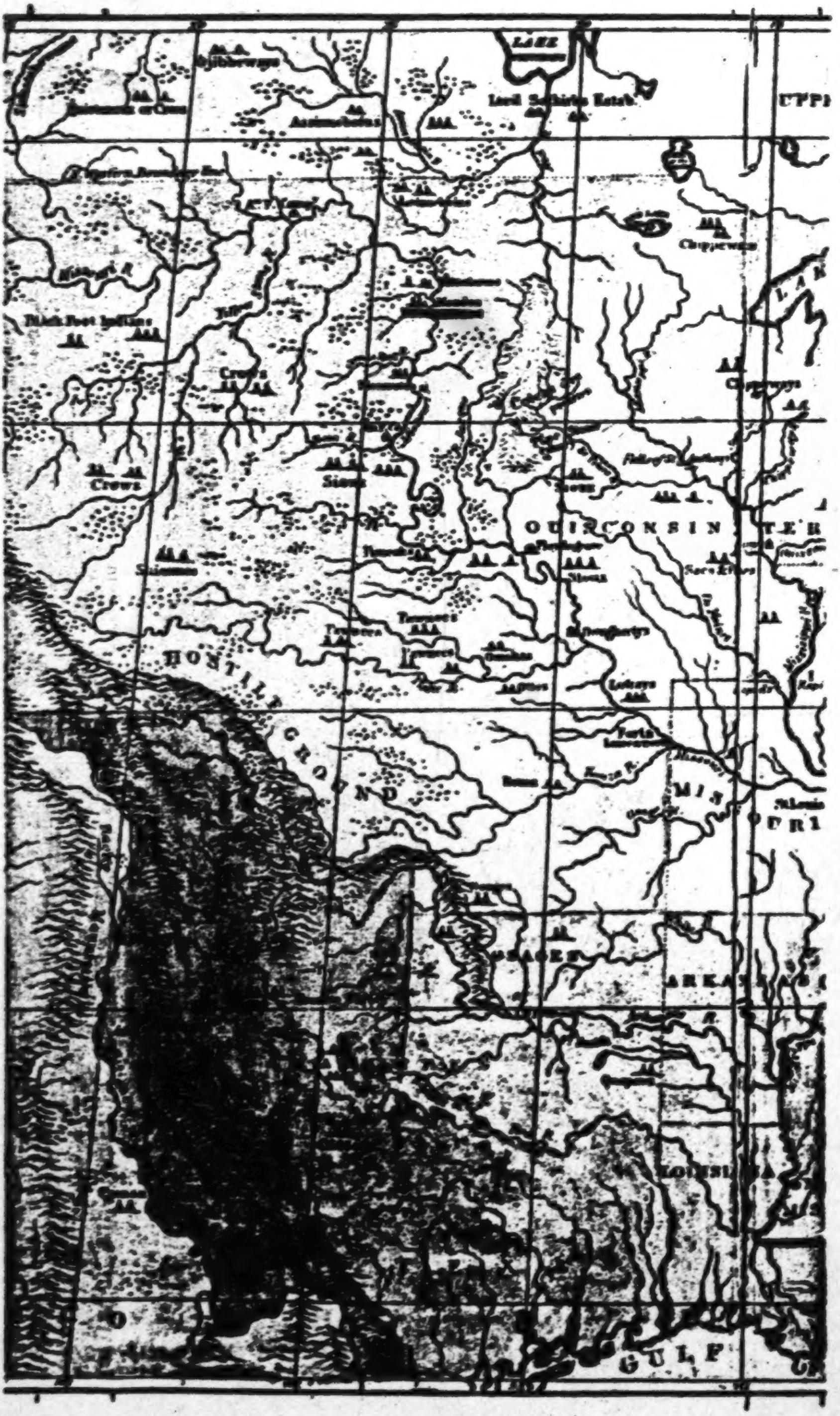
Buffalo Range

[face p. 1 (A)]

7: Catlin R, E-5 (1832-1840) 1857

NQ17 Mandan NQ17

102

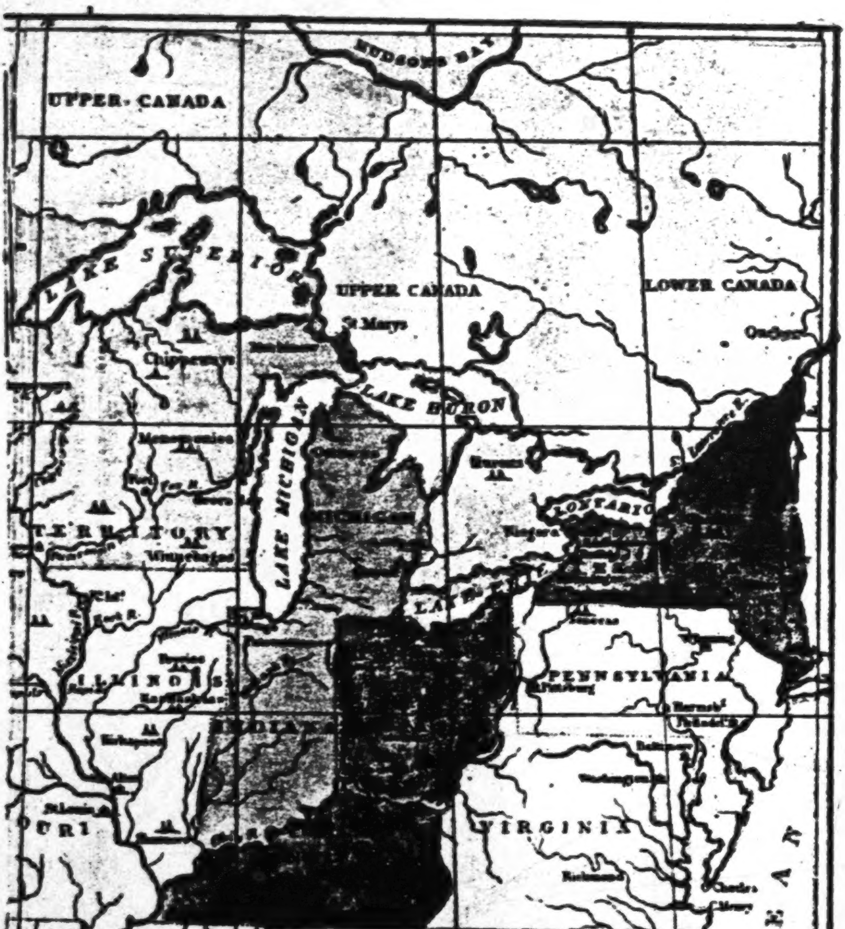

Lake
Ojibbeways
Assinneboins
Lord Selkirk's Estab.
Chippeways
Black Foot Indians
Crows
Crows
Sioux
OUISCONSIN TER
Sioux
Sacs & Foxes
HOSTILE
GROUND
MIS OURI
St. Louis
OSAGES
ARKANSAS
LOUISIANA
GULF

[face p. 1 (B)]

7: Catlin R, E-5 (1832-1840) 1857

NQ17 Mandan NQ17

102


HUDSONS BAY
UPPER CANADA
LAKE SUPERIOR
UPPER CANADA
LOWER CANADA
St Marys
LAKE HURON
LAKE MICHIGAN
TERRITORY
Winnebagoes
L. ONTARIO
Niagara
LAKE ERIE
PENNSYLVANIA
ILLINOIS
INDIANA
VIRGINIA
Richmond
MISSOURI
TENNESSEE
NORTH CAROLINA
SOUTH CAROLINA
GEORGIA
MEXICO
OCEAN

[face p. 1 (c)]

114 who entered that beautiful and famed valley soon ofter the close of the revolutionary war, and the disastrous event of the "Indian massacre."

The early part of my life was whiled away, apparently, somewhat in vain, with books reluctantly held in one hand, and a rifle or fishing-pole firmly and affectionately grasped in the other.

At the urgent request of my father, who was a practising lawyer, I was prevailed upon to abandon these favourite themes, and also my occasional dabblings with the brush, which had secured already a corner in my affections; and I commenced reading the law for a profession, under the direction of Reeve and Gould, of Connecticut. I attended the lectures of these learned judges for two years—was admitted to the bar—and practised the law, as a sort of *Nimrodical* lawyer, in my native land, for the term of two or three years; when I very deliberately sold my law library and all (save my rifle and fishing-tackle), and converting their proceeds into brushes and paint pots; I commenced the art of painting in Philadelphia, without teacher or adviser.

I there closely applied my hand to the labours of the art for several years; during which time my mind was continually reaching for some branch or enterprise of the art, on which to devote a whole life-time of enthusiasm; when a delegation of some ten or fifteen noble and dignified-looking Indians, from the wilds of the "Far West," suddenly arrived in the city, arrayed and equipped in all their classic beauty,—with shield and helmet,—with tunic and manteau,—tinted and tasselled off, exactly for the painter's palette!

In silent and stoic dignity, these lords of the forest strutted about the city for a few days, wrapped in their pictured robes, with their brows plumed with the quills of the war-eagle, attracting the gaze and admiration of all who beheld them. After this, they took their leave for Washington City, and I was left to reflect and regret, which I did long and deeply, until I came to the following deductions and conclusions.

121 Black and blue cloth and civilization are destined, not only to veil, but to obliterate the grace and beauty of Nature. Man, in the simplicity and loftiness of his nature, unrestrained and unfettered by the disguises of art, is surely the most beautiful model for the painter,—and the country from which he hails is unquestionably the best study or school of the arts in the world: such I am sure, from the models I have seen, is the wilderness of North America. And the history and customs of such a people, preserved by pictorial illustrations, are themes worthy the life-time of one man, and nothing short of the loss of my life, shall prevent me from visiting their country, and of becoming their historian.

114 There was something inexpressibly delightful in the above resolve, which was to bring me amidst such living models for my brush: and at the same time to place in my hands again, for my living and protection, the objects of my heart above-named; which had long been laid by to rust and decay

114 in the city, without the remotest prospect of again contributing to my amusement.

I had fully resolved—I opened my views to my friends and relations, but got not one advocate or abettor. I tried fairly and faithfully, but it was in vain to reason with those whose anxieties were ready to fabricate every difficulty and danger that could be imagined, without being able to understand or appreciate the extent or importance of my designs, and I broke from them all,—from my wife and my aged parents,—myself my only adviser and protector.

With these views firmly fixed—armed, equipped, and supplied, I started out in the year 1832, and penetrated the vast and pathless wilds which are familiarly denominated the great "Far West" of the North American Continent, with a light heart, inspired with an enthusiastic hope and reliance that I could meet and overcome all the hazards and privations of a life devoted to the production of a literal and graphic delineation of the living manners, customs, and character of an interesting race of people, who are rapidly passing away from the face of the earth—lending a hand to a dying nation, who have no historians or biographers of their own to pourtray with fidelity their native looks and history; thus snatching from a hasty oblivion what could be saved for the benefit of posterity, and perpetuating it, as a fair and just monument, to the memory of a truly lofty and noble race.

I have spent about eight years already in the pursuit above-named, having been for the most of that time immersed in the Indian country, mingling with red men, and identifying myself with them as much as possible, in their games and amusements; in order the better to familiarize myself with their superstitions and mysteries, which are the keys to Indian life and character.

It was during the several years of my life just mentioned, and whilst I was in familiar participation with them in their sports and amusements, that I penned the following series of epistles; describing only such glowing or curious scenes and events as passed under my immediate observation; leaving their early history, and many of their traditions, language, &c. for a subsequent and much more elaborate work, for which I have procured the materials, and which I may eventually publish.

121 I set out on my arduous and perilous undertaking with the determination of reaching, ultimately, every tribe of Indians on the Continent of North America, and of bringing home faithful portraits of their principal personages, both men and women, from each tribe; views of their villages, games, &c. and full notes on their character and history. I designed, also, to procure their costumes, and a complete collection of their manufactures and weapons, and to perpetuate them in a *Gallery unique*, for the use and instruction of future ages.

114 I claim whatever merit there may have been in the originality of such a

114 design, as I was undoubtedly the first artist who ever set out upon such a work, designing to carry his canvass to the Rocky Mountains; and a considerable part of the following Letters were written and published in the New York Papers, as early as the years 1832 and 1833; long before the Tours of Washington Irving, and several others, whose interesting narratives are before the world.

I have, as yet, by no means visited *all* the tribes; but I have progressed a very great way with the enterprise, and with far greater and more complete success than I expected.

I have visited forty-eight different tribes, the greater part of which I found speaking different languages, and containing in all 400,000 souls. I have brought home safe, and in good order, 310 portraits in oil, all painted in their native dress, and in their own wigwams; and also 200 other paintings in oil, containing views of their villages—their wigwams—their games and religious ceremonies—their dances—their ball plays—their buffalo hunting, and other amusements (containing in all, over 3000 full-length figures); and the landscapes of the country they live in, as well as a very extensive and curious collection of their costumes, and all their other manufactures, from the size of a wigwam down to the size of a quill or a rattle.

A considerable part of the above-named paintings, and Indian manufactures, will be found amongst the very numerous illustrations in the following pages; having been, in every instance, faithfully copied and reduced by my own hand, for the engraver, from my original paintings; and the reader of this book who will take the pains to step in to "CATLIN'S NORTH AMERICAN INDIAN GALLERY," will find nearly every scene and custom which is described in this work, as well as many others, carefully and correctly delineated, and displayed upon the walls, and every weapon (and every "Sachem" and every "Sagamore" who has wielded them) according to the tenor of the tales herein recited.

So much of *myself* and of my *works*, which is all that I wish to say at present.

Of the INDIANS, I have much more to say, and to the following delineations of them, and their character and customs, I shall make no further apology for requesting the attention of my readers.

121 The Indians (as I shall call them), the savages or red men of the forests and prairies of North America, are at this time a subject of great interest and some importance to the civilized world; rendered more particularly so in this age, from their relative position to, and their rapid declension from, the civilized nations of the earth. A numerous nation of human beings, whose origin is beyond the reach of human investigation,—whose early history is lost—whose term of national existence is nearly expired—three-fourths of whose country has fallen into the possession of civilized man within the short space of 250 years—twelve millions of whose bodies have fattened the soil in the mean time; who have fallen victims to whiskey, the small-pox and the

ayonet; leaving at this time but a meagre proportion to live a short time onger, in the certain apprehension of soon sharing a similar fate.

The writer who would undertake to embody the whole history of such a eople, with all their misfortunes and calamities, must needs have much ore space than I have allotted to this epitome; and he must needs begin lso (as I am doing) with those who are *living*, or he would be very apt to well upon the preamble of his work, until the present living remnants of he race should have passed away; and their existence and customs, like hose of ages gone bye, become subjects of doubt and incredulity to the orld for whom his book was preparing. Such an historian also, to do them justice, must needs correct many theories and opinions which have, either gnorantly or maliciously, gone forth to the world in indelible characters; nd gather and arrange a vast deal which has been but imperfectly recorded, r placed to the credit of a people who have not had the means of recording t themselves; but have entrusted it, from necessity, to the honesty and unctuality of their enemies.

In such an history should be embodied, also, a correct account of their reatment, and the causes which have led to their rapid destruction; and a lain and systematical prophecy as to the time and manner of their final xtinction, based upon the causes and the ratio of their former and present eclension.

So Herculean a task may fall to my lot at a future period, or it may not; ut I send forth these volumes at this time, fresh and full of their living eeds and customs, as a familiar and unstudied introduction (at least) to hem and their native character; which I confidently hope will repay the eaders who read for information and historical facts, as well as those who ead but for amusement.

The world know generally, that the Indians of North America are copper-coloured; that their eyes and their hair are black, *&c.*; that they are mostly ncivilized, and consequently unchristianized; that they are nevertheless uman beings, with features, thoughts, reason, and sympathies like our own; ut few yet know how they *live*, how they *dress*, how they *worship*, what re their actions, their customs, their religion, their amusements, &c. as hey practise them in the uncivilized regions of their uninvaded country, hich it is the main object of this work, clearly and distinctly to set forth.

It would be impossible at the same time, in a book of these dimensions, to xplain *all* the manners and customs of these people; but as far as they are arrated, they have been described by my pen, upon the spot, as I have een them transacted; and if some few of my narrations should seem a *ittle too highly coloured*, I trust the world will be ready to extend to me hat pardon which it is customary to yield to all artists whose main faults xist in the vividness of their colouring, rather than in the drawing of their ictures; but there is nothing else in them, I think, that I should ask ardon for, even though some of them should stagger credulity, and incur

121 for me the censure of those critics, who sometimes, unthinkingly or unmercifully, sit at home at their desks, enjoying the luxury of wine and a good cigar, over the simple narration of the honest and weather-worn traveller (who shortens his half-starved life in catering for the world), to condemn him and his work to oblivion, and his wife and his little children to poverty and starvation; merely because he describes scenes which they have not beheld, and which, consequently, they are unable to believe.

The Indians of North America, as I have before said, are copper-coloured, with long black hair, black eyes, tall, straight, and elastic forms—are less than two millions in number—were originally the undisputed owners of the soil, and got their title to their lands from the Great Spirit who created them on it,—were once a happy and flourishing people, enjoying all the comforts and luxuries of life which they knew of, and consequently cared for:—were sixteen millions in numbers, and sent that number of daily prayers to the Almighty, and thanks for his goodness and protection. Their country was entered by white men, but a few hundred years since; and thirty millions of these are now scuffling for the goods and luxuries of life, over the bones and ashes of twelve millions of red men; six millions of whom have fallen victims to the small-pox, and the remainder to the sword, the bayonet, and whiskey; all of which means of their death and destruction have been introduced and visited upon them by acquisitive white men; and by white men, also, whose forefathers were welcomed and embraced in the land where the poor Indian met and fed them with "ears of green corn and with pemican." Of the two millions remaining alive at this time, about 1,400,000, are already the miserable living victims and dupes of white man's cupidity, degraded, discouraged and lost in the bewildering maze that is produced by the use of whiskey and its concomitant vices; and the remaining number are yet unroused and unenticed from their wild haunts or their primitive modes, by the dread or love of white man and his allurements.

It has been with these, mostly, that I have spent my time, and of these, chiefly, and their customs, that the following Letters treat. Their habits (and their's alone) as we can see them transacted, are native, and such as I have wished to fix and preserve for future ages.

Of the dead, and of those who are dying, of those who have suffered death, and of those who are now trodden and kicked through it, I may speak more fully in some deductions at the close of this book; or at some future time, when I may find more leisure, and may be able to speak of these scenes without giving offence to the world, or to any body in it.

Such a portrait then as I have set forth in the following pages (taken by myself from the free and vivid realities of life, instead of the vague and uncertain imagery of recollection, or from the haggard deformities and distortions of disease and death), I offer to the world for their amusement, as well as for their information; and I trust they will pardon me, if it should be thought that I have over-estimated the Indian character, or at other times descended too much into the details and minutiæ of Indian mysteries and absurdities.

The reader, then, to understand me rightly, and draw from these Letters the information which they are intended to give, must follow me a vast way from the civilized world; he must needs wend his way from the city of New York, over the Alleghany, and far beyond the mighty Missouri, and even to the base and summit of the Rocky Mountains, some two or three thousand miles from the Atlantic coast. He should forget many theories he has read in the books of Indian barbarities, of wanton butcheries and murders; and divest himself, as far as possible of the deadly prejudices which he has carried from his childhood, against this most unfortunate and most abused part of the race of his fellow-man.

He should consider, that if he has seen the savages of North America without making such a tour, he has fixed his eyes upon and drawn his conclusions (in all probability) only from those who inhabit the frontier; whose habits have been changed—whose pride has been cut down—whose country has been ransacked—whose wives and daughters have been shamefully abused—whose lands have been wrested from them—whose limbs have become enervated and naked by the excessive use of whiskey—whose friends and relations have been prematurely thrown into their graves—whose native pride and dignity have at last given way to the unnatural vices which civilized cupidity has engrafted upon them, to be silently nurtured and magnified by a burning sense of injury and injustice, and ready for that cruel vengeance which often falls from the hand that is palsied by refined abuses, and yet unrestrained by the glorious influences of refined and moral cultivation.—That if he has laid up what he considers well-founded knowledge of these people, from books which he has read, and from newspapers only, he should pause at least, and withhold his sentence before he passes it upon the character of a people, who are dying at the hands of their enemies, without the means of recording their own annals—struggling in their nakedness with their simple weapons, against guns and gunpowder—against whiskey and steel, and disease, and mailed warriors who are continually trampling them to the earth, and at last exultingly promulgating from the very soil which they have wrested from the poor savage, the history of his cruelties and barbarities, whilst his bones are quietly resting under the very furrows which their ploughs are turning.

So great and unfortunate are the disparities between savage and civil, in numbers—in weapons and defences—in enterprise, in craft, and in education, that the former is almost universally the sufferer either in peace or in war; and not less so after his pipe and his tomahawk have retired to the grave with him, and his character is left to be entered upon the pages of history, and that justice done to his memory which from necessity, he has intrusted to his enemy.

Amongst the numerous historians, however, of these strange people, they have had some friends who have done them justice; yet as a part of all systems of justice whenever it is meted to the poor Indian, it comes invariably too late, or is administered at an ineffectual distance; and that too when his enemies are continually about him, and effectually applying the means of his destruction.

Some writers, I have been grieved to see, have written down the character of the North American Indian, as dark, relentless, cruel and murderous in the last degree; with scarce a quality to stamp their existence of a higher order than that of the brutes:—whilst others have given them a high rank, as I feel myself authorized to do, as honourable and highly-intellectual beings; and others, both friends and foes to the red men, have spoken of them as an "anomaly in nature!"

In this place I have no time or inclination to reply to so unaccountable an assertion as this; contenting myself with the belief, that the term would be far more correctly applied to that part of the human family who have strayed farthest from nature, than it could be to those who are simply moving in, and filling the sphere for which they were designed by the Great Spirit who made them.

From what I have seen of these people I feel authorized to say, that there is nothing very strange or unaccountable in their character; but that it is a simple one, and easy to be learned and understood, if the right means be taken to familiarize ourselves with it. Although it has its dark spots, yet there is much in it to be applauded, and much to recommend it to the admiration of the enlightened world. And I trust that the reader, who looks through these volumes with care, will be disposed to join me in the conclusion that the North American Indian in his native state, is an honest, hospitable, faithful, brave, warlike, cruel, revengeful, relentless,—yet honourable, contemplative and religious being.

If such be the case, I am sure there is enough in it to recommend it to the fair perusal of the world, and charity enough in all civilized countries, in this enlightened age, to extend a helping hand to a dying race; provided that prejudice and fear can be removed, which have heretofore constantly held the civilized portions in dread of the savage—and away from that familiar and friendly embrace, in which alone his true native character can be justly appreciated.

I am fully convinced, from a long familiarity with these people, that the Indian's misfortune has consisted chiefly in our ignorance of their true native character and disposition, which has always held us at a distrustful distance from them; inducing us to look upon them in no other light than that of a hostile foe, and worthy only of that system of continued warfare and abuse that has been for ever waged against them.

There is no difficulty in approaching the Indian and getting acquainted with him in his wild and unsophisticated state, and finding him an honest and honourable man; with feelings to meet feelings, if the above prejudice and dread can be laid aside, and any one will take the pains, as I have done, to go and see him in the simplicity of his native state, smoking his pipe under his own humble roof, with his wife and children around him, and his faithful dogs and horses hanging about his hospitable tenement.—So the world *may* see him and smoke his friendly pipe, which will be invariably extended to them; and share, with a hearty welcome, the best that his wigwam affords for the appetite, which is always set out to a stranger the next moment after he enters.

But so the mass of the world, most assuredly, will *not* see these people; for they are too far off, and approachable to those only whose avarice or cupidity alone lead them to those remote regions, and whose shame prevents them from publishing to the world the virtues which they have thrown down and trampled under foot.

The very use of the word savage, as it is applied in its general sense, I am inclined to believe is an abuse of the word, and the people to whom it is applied. The word, in its true definition, means no more than *wild*, or *wild man;* and a wild man may have been endowed by his Maker with all the humane and noble traits that inhabit the heart of a tame man. Our ignorance and dread or fear of these people, therefore, have given a new definition to the adjective; and nearly the whole civilized world apply the word *savage*, as expressive of the most ferocious, cruel, and murderous character that can be described.

The grizzly bear is called savage, because he is blood-thirsty, ravenous and cruel; and so is the tiger, and they, like the poor red man, have been feared and dreaded (from the distance at which ignorance and prejudice have kept us from them, or from resented abuses which we have practised when we have come in close contact with them), until Van Amburgh shewed the world, that even these ferocious and unreasoning animals wanted only the friendship and close embrace of their master, to respect and to love him.

As evidence of the hospitality of these ignorant and benighted people, and also of their honesty and honour, there will be found recorded many striking instances in the following pages. And also, as an offset to these, many evidences of the dark and cruel, as well as ignorant and disgusting excesses of passions, unrestrained by the salutary influences of laws and Christianity.

I have roamed about from time to time during seven or eight years, visiting and associating with some three or four hundred thousand of these people, under an almost infinite variety of circumstances; and from the very many and decided voluntary acts of their hospitality and kindness, I feel bound to pronounce them, by nature, a kind and hospitable people. I have been welcomed generally in their country, and treated to the best that they could give me, without any charges made for my board; they have often escorted me through their enemies' country at some hazard to their own lives, and aided me in passing mountains and rivers with my awkward bag-

121 gage; and under all of these circumstances of exposure, no Indian ever betrayed me, struck me a blow, or stole from me a shilling's worth of my property that I am aware of.

This is saying a great deal, (and proving it too, if the reader will believe me) in favour of the virtues of these people; when it is borne in mind, as it should be, that there is no law in their land to punish a man for theft—that locks and keys are not known in their country—that the commandments have never been divulged amongst them; nor can any human retribution fall upon the head of a thief, save the disgrace which attaches as a stigma to his character, in the eyes of his people about him.

And thus in these little communities, strange as it may seem, in the absence of all systems of jurisprudence, I have often beheld peace and happiness, and quiet, reigning supreme, for which even kings and emperors might envy them. I have seen rights and virtue protected, and wrongs redressed; and I have seen conjugal, filial and paternal affection in the simplicity and contentedness of nature. I have unavoidably, formed warm and enduring attachments to some of these men which I do not wish to forget—who have brought me near to their hearts, and in our final separation have embraced me in their arms, and commended me and my affairs to the keeping of the Great Spirit.

For the above reasons, the reader will be disposed to forgive me for dwelling so long and so strong on the justness of the claims of these people; and for my occasional expressions of sadness, when my heart bleeds for the fate that awaits the remainder of their unlucky race; which is long to be outlived by the rocks, by the beasts, and even birds and reptiles of the country they live in;—set upon by their fellow-man, whose cupidity, it is feared, will fix no bounds to the Indian's earthly calamity, short of the grave.

I cannot help but repeat, before I close this Letter, that the tribes of the red men of North America, as a nation of human beings, are on their wane; that (to use their own very beautiful figure) "they are fast travelling to the shades of their fathers, towards the setting sun;" and that the traveller who would see these people in their native simplicity and beauty, must needs be hastily on his way to the prairies and Rocky Mountains, or he will see them only as they are now seen on the frontiers, as a basket of *dead game*,—harassed, chased, bleeding and dead; with their plumage and colours despoiled; to be gazed amongst in vain for some system or moral, or for some scale by which to estimate their true native character, other than that which has too often recorded them but a dark and unintelligible mass of cruelty and barbarity.

000 Without further comments I close this Letter, introducing my readers at once to the heart of the Indian country, only asking their forgiveness for having made it so long, and their patience whilst travelling through the following pages (as I journeyed through those remote realms) in search of information and rational amusement; in tracing out the true character of

that "*strange anomaly*" of man in the simple elements of his nature, undissolved or compounded into the mysteries of enlightened and fashionable life.

[Note, beginning p. 11, & pp. 12-79 omitted]

LETTER—No. 11.

MANDAN VILLAGE, *UPPER MISSOURI.*

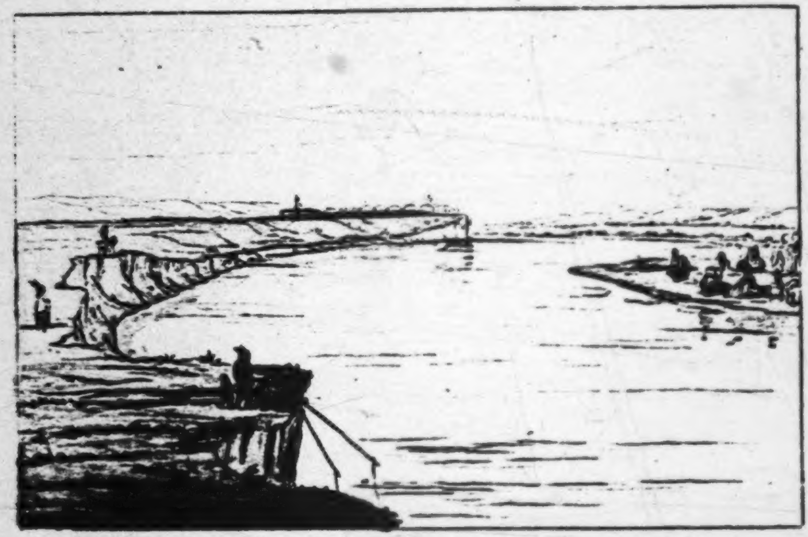
000 I SAID that I was here in the midst of a strange people, which is literally true; and I find myself surrounded by subjects and scenes worthy the pens of Irving or Cooper—of the pencils of Raphael or Hogarth; rich in legends and romances, which would require no aid of the imagination for a book or a picture.

101 The Mandans (or See-pohs-kah-nu-mah-kah-kee, "people of the pheasants," as they call themselves), are perhaps one of the most ancient tribes of Indians in our country. Their origin, like that of all the other tribes is from necessity, involved in mystery and obscurity. Their traditions and peculiarities I shall casually recite in this or future epistles; which when understood, will at once, I think, denominate them a peculiar and distinct race. They take great pride in relating their traditions, with regard to their origin; contending that they were the *first* people created on earth. Their existence in these regions has not been from a very ancient period; and, from what I could learn of their traditions, they have, at a former period, been a very numerous and powerful nation; but by the continual wars which have existed between them and their neighbours, they have been reduced to their present numbers.

361 This tribe is at present located on the west bank of the Missouri, about 1800 miles above St. Louis, and 200 below the Mouth of Yellow Stone river. They have two villages only, which are about two miles distant from each other; and number in all (as near as I can learn), about 2000 souls. Their present villages are beautifully located, and judiciously also, for defence against the assaults of their enemies. The site of the lower (or principal) town, in particular (PLATE 45), is one of the most beautiful and pleasing that can be seen in the world, and even more beautiful than imagination could ever create. In the very midst of an extensive valley (embraced within a thousand graceful swells and parapets or mounds of interminable green, changing to blue, as they vanish in distance) is built the city, or principal town of the Mandans. On an extensive plain (which is covered with a green turf, as well as the hills and dales, as far as the eye can possibly range, without tree or bush to be seen) are to be seen rising from the ground, and towards the heavens, domes—(not "of gold," but)

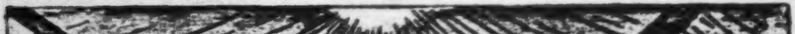
7: Catlin R, E-5 (1832-1840) 1857
NQ17 Mandan NQ17

361



45

353
354



46

[facing p. 80]

361 of dirt—and the thousand spears (not "spires") and scalp-poles, &c. &c., of the semi-subterraneous village of the hospitable and gentlemanly Mandans.

174 These people formerly (and within the recollection of many of their oldest men) lived fifteen or twenty miles farther down the river, in ten contiguous villages; the marks or ruins of which are yet plainly to be seen. At that period, it is evident, as well from the number of lodges which their villages contained, as from their traditions, that their numbers were much greater than at the present day.

There are other, and very interesting, traditions and historical facts relative to a still prior location and condition of these people, of which I shall speak more fully on a future occasion. From these, when they are promulged, I think there may be a pretty fair deduction drawn, that they formerly occupied the lower part of the Missouri, and even the Ohio and Muskingum, and have gradually made their way up the Missouri to where they now are.

There are many remains on the river below this place (and, in fact, to be seen nearly as low down as St. Louis), which shew clearly the peculiar construction of Mandan lodges, and consequently carry a strong proof of the above position. While descending the river, however, which I shall commence in a few weeks, in a canoe, this will be a subject of interest; and I shall give it close examination.

The ground on which the Mandan village is at present built, was admi-
361 rably selected for defence; being on a bank forty or fifty feet above the
712 bed of the river. The greater part of this bank is nearly perpendicular, and of solid rock. The river, suddenly changing its course to a right-angle, protects two sides of the village, which is built upon this promontory or angle; they have therefore but one side to protect, which is effectually done by a strong piquet, and a ditch inside of it, of three or four feet in depth. The piquet is composed of timbers of a foot or more in diameter, and eighteen feet high, set firmly in the ground at sufficient distances from each other to admit of guns and other missiles to be fired between them. The ditch (unlike that of civilized modes of fortification) is inside of the piquet, in which their warriors screen their bodies from the view and weapons of their enemies, whilst they are reloading and discharging their weapons through the piquets.

The Mandans are undoubtedly secure in their villages, from the attacks of
361 any Indian nation, and have nothing to fear, except when they meet their
342 enemy on the prairie. Their village has a most novel appearance to the eye of a stranger; their lodges are closely grouped together, leaving but just room enough for walking and riding between them; and appear from without, to be built entirely of dirt; but one is surprised when he enters them, to see the neatness, comfort, and spacious dimensions of these earth-covered dwellings. They all have a circular form, and are from forty to sixty feet in diameter. Their foundations are prepared by digging some two feet in the ground, and forming the floor of earth, by levelling the requisite size for

361 the lodge. These floors or foundations are all perfectly circular, and varying
342 in size in proportion to the number of inmates, or of the quality or standing of the families which are to occupy them. The superstructure is then produced, by arranging, inside of this circular excavation, firmly fixed in the ground and resting against the bank, a barrier or wall of timbers, some eight or nine inches in diameter, of equal height (about six feet) placed on end, and resting against each other, supported by a formidable embankment of earth raised against them outside; then, resting upon the tops of these timbers or piles, are others of equal size and equal in numbers, of twenty or twenty-five feet in length, resting firmly against each other, and sending their upper or smaller ends towards the centre and top of the lodge; rising at an angle of forty-five degrees to the apex or sky-light, which is about three or four feet in diameter, answering as a chimney and a sky-light at the same time. The roof of the lodge being thus formed, is supported by beams passing around the inner part of the lodge about the middle of these poles or timbers, and themselves upheld by four or five large posts passing down to the floor of the lodge. On the top of, and over the poles forming the roof, is placed a complete mat of willow-boughs, of half a foot or more in thickness, which protects the timbers from the dampness of the earth, with which the lodge is covered from bottom to top, to the depth of two or three feet; and then with a hard or tough clay, which is impervious to water, and which with long use becomes quite hard, and a lounging place for the whole family in pleasant weather—for sage—for wooing lovers—for dogs and all; an airing place—a look-out—a place for gossip and mirth—a seat for the solitary gaze and meditations of the stern warrior, who sits and contemplates the peaceful mirth and happiness that is breathed beneath him, fruits of his hard-fought battles, on fields of desperate combat with bristling Red Men.

342 The floors of these dwellings are of earth, but so hardened by use, and
353 swept so clean, and tracked by bare and moccassined feet, that they have
almost a polish, and would scarcely soil the whitest linen. In the centre,
[354] and immediately under the sky-light (PLATE 46) is the fire-place—a hole of four or five feet in diameter, of a circular form, sunk a foot or more below the surface, and curbed around with stone. Over the fire-place, and suspended from the apex of diverging props or poles, is generally seen the pot or kettle, filled with buffalo meat; and around it are the family, reclining in all the most picturesque attitudes and groups, resting on their buffalo-robes
[592] and beautiful mats of rushes. These cabins are so spacious, that they hold
from twenty to forty persons—a family and all their connexions. They all
352 sleep on bedsteads similar in form to ours, but generally not quite so high; made of round poles rudely lashed together with thongs. A buffalo skin, fresh stripped from the animal, is stretched across the bottom poles, and about two feet from the floor; which, when it dries, becomes much contracted, and forms a perfect sacking-bottom. The fur side of this skin is placed uppermost, on which they lie with great comfort, with a buffalo-robe

folded up for a pillow, and others drawn over them instead of blankets. 352
These beds, as far as I have seen them (and I have visited almost every
lodge in the village), are uniformly screened with a covering of buffalo or
elk skins, oftentimes beautifully dressed and placed over the upright poles
or frame, like a suit of curtains; leaving a hole in front, sufficiently spacious
for the occupant to pass in and out, to and from his or her bed. Some
of these coverings or curtains are exceedingly beautiful, being cut tastefully
into fringe, and handsomely ornamented with porcupine's quills and picture
writings or hieroglyphics.

From the great number of inmates in these lodges, they are necessarily 352
very spacious, and the number of beds considerable. It is no uncommon
thing to see these lodges fifty feet in diameter inside (which is an immense 353
room), with a row of these curtained beds extending quite around their sides,
being some ten or twelve of them, placed four or five feet apart, and the
space between them occupied by a large post, fixed quite firm in the ground,
and six or seven feet high, with large wooden pegs or bolts in it, on which 353
are hung and grouped, with a wild and startling taste, the arms and armour
of the respective proprietor; consisting of his whitened shield, embossed and [411]
emblazoned with the figure of his protecting *medicine* (or mystery), his bow
and quiver, his war-club or battle-axe, his dart or javelin—his tobacco
pouch and pipe—his medicine-bag—and his eagle—ermine or raven head-dress;
and over all, and on the top of the post (as if placed by some conjuror
or Indian magician, to guard and protect the spell of wildness that
reigns in this strange place), stands forth and in full relief the head and
horns of a buffalo, which is, by a village regulation, owned and possessed [535]
by every man in the nation, and hung at the head of his bed, which he uses
as a mask when called upon by the chiefs, to join in the buffalo-dance,
of which I shall say more in a future epistle

This arrangement of beds, of arms, &c., combining the most vivid display and arrangement of colours, of furs, of trinkets—of barbed and glistening points and steel—of mysteries and hocus pocus, together with the sombre and smoked colour of the roof and sides of the lodge; and the wild, and rude and red—the graceful (though uncivil) conversational, garrulous, story-telling and happy, though ignorant and untutored groups, that are smoking their pipes—wooing their sweethearts, and embracing their little ones about their peaceful and endeared fire-sides; together with their pots and kettles, spoons, and other culinary articles of their own manufacture, around them; present altogether, one of the most picturesque scenes to the eye of a stranger, that can be possibly seen; and far more wild and vivid than could ever be imagined.

Reader, I said these people were garrulous, story-telling and happy; this 000
is true, and literally so; and it belongs to me to establish the fact, and
correct the error which seems to have gone forth to the world on this subject.

As I have before observed, there is no subject that I know of within the

000 scope and reach of human wisdom, on which the civilized world in this enlightened age are more incorrectly informed, than upon that of the true manners and customs, and moral condition, rights and abuses, of the North American Indians; and that, as I have also before remarked, chiefly on account of the difficulty of our cultivating a fair and honourable acquaintance with them, and doing them the justice, and ourselves the credit, of a fair and impartial investigation of their true character. The present age of refinement and research has brought every thing else that I know of (and a vast deal more than the most enthusiastic mind ever dreamed of) within the scope and fair estimation of refined intellect and of science; while the wild and timid savage, with his interesting customs and modes has vanished, or his character has become changed, at the approach of the enlightened and intellectual world; who follow him like a phantom for awhile, and in ignorance of his true character at last turn back to the common business and social transactions of life.

181 Owing to the above difficulties, which have stood in the way, the world have fallen into many egregious errors with regard to the true modes and meaning of the savage, which I am striving to set forth and correct in the course of these epistles. And amongst them all, there is none more common, nor more entirely erroneous, nor more easily refuted, than the current one, that "the Indian is a sour, morose, reserved and taciturn man." I have heard this opinion advanced a thousand times and I believed it; but such certainly, is not uniformly nor generally the case.

I have observed in all my travels amongst the Indian tribes, and more particularly amongst these unassuming people, that they are a far more talkative and conversational race than can easily be seen in the civilized world. This assertion, like many others I shall occasionally make, will somewhat startle the folks at the East, yet it is true. No one can look into the wigwams of these people, or into any little momentary group of them, without being at once struck with the conviction that small-talk, gossip, garrulity, and story-telling, are the leading passions with them, who have little else to do in the world, but to while away their lives in the innocent and endless amusement of the exercise of those talents with which Nature has liberally endowed them, for their mirth and enjoyment.

One has but to walk or ride about this little town and its environs for a few hours in a pleasant day, and overlook the numerous games and gambols, where their notes and yelps of exultation are unceasingly vibrating in the atmosphere; or peep into their wigwams (and watch the glistening fun that's beaming from the noses, cheeks, and chins, of the crouching, cross-legged, and prostrate groups around the fire; where the pipe is passed, and jokes and anecdote, and laughter are excessive) to become convinced that it is natural to laugh and be merry. Indeed it would be strange if a race of people like these, who have little else to do or relish in life, should be curtailed in that source of pleasure and amusement; and it would be also strange, if a life-time of indulgence and practice in so 181 innocent and productive a mode of amusement, free from the cares and anxieties of business or professions, should not advance them in their modes, and enable them to draw far greater pleasure from such sources, than we in the civilized and business world can possibly feel. If the uncultivated condition of their minds curtails the number of their enjoyments; yet they are free from, and independent of, a thousand cares and jealousies, which arise from mercenary motives in the civilized world; and are yet far a-head of us (in my opinion) in the real and uninterrupted enjoyment of their simple natural faculties.

They live in a country and in communities, where it is not customary to look forward into the future with concern, for they live without incurring the expenses of life, which are absolutely necessary and unavoidable in the enlightened world; and of course their inclinations and faculties are solely directed to the enjoyment of the present day, without the sober reflections on the past or apprehensions of the future.

With minds thus unexpanded and uninfluenced by the thousand passions and ambitions of civilized life, it is easy and natural to concentrate their thoughts and their conversation upon the little and trifling occurrences of their lives. They are fond of fun and good cheer, and can laugh easily and heartily at a slight joke, of which their peculiar modes of life furnish them an inexhaustible fund, and enable them to cheer their little circle about the wigwam fire-side with endless laughter and garrulity.

It may be thought, that I am taking a great deal of pains to establish 000 this fact, and I am dwelling longer upon it than I otherwise should, inasmuch as I am opposing an error that seems to have become current through the world; and which, if it be once corrected, removes a material difficulty, which has always stood in the way of a fair and just estimation of the Indian character. For the purpose of placing the Indian in a proper light before the world, as I hope to do in many respects, it is of importance to me—it is but justice to the savage—and justice to my readers also, that such points should be cleared up as I proceed; and for the world who enquire for correct and just information, they must take my words for the truth, or else come to this country and look for themselves, into these grotesque circles of never-ending laughter and fun, instead of going to Washington City to gaze on the poor embarrassed Indian who is called there by his "Great Father," to contend with the sophistry of the learned and acquisitive world, in bartering away his lands with the graves and the hunting grounds of his ancestors. There is not the proper place to study the Indian character; yet it is the place where the sycophant and the scribbler go to gaze and frown upon him—to learn his character, and write his history! and because he does not speak, and quaffs the delicious beverage which he receives from white mens' hands, "he's a speechless brute and a drunkard." An Indian is a beggar in Washington City, and a white man is

000 almost equally so in the Mandan village. An Indian in Washington is mute, is dumb and embarrassed; and so is a white man (and for the very same reasons) in this place—he has nobody to talk to.

A wild Indian, to reach the civilized world, must needs travel some thousands of miles in vehicles of conveyance, to which he is unaccustomed—through latitudes and longitudes which are new to him—living on food that he is unused to—stared and gazed at by the thousands and tens of thousands whom he cannot talk to—his heart grieving and his body sickening at the exhibition of white men's wealth and luxuries, which are enjoyed on the land, and over the bones of his ancestors. And at the end of his journey he stands (like a caged animal) to be scanned—to be criticised—to be pitied—and heralded to the world as a mute—as a brute, and a beggar.

A white man, to reach this village, must travel by steam-boat—by canoes—on horseback and on foot; swim rivers—wade quagmires—fight mosquitoes—patch his moccasins, and patch them again and again, and his breeches; live on meat alone—sleep on the ground the whole way, and think and dream of his friends he has left behind; and when he gets here, half-starved, and half-naked, and more than half sick, he finds himself a beggar for a place to sleep, and for something to eat; a mute amongst thousands who flock about him, to look and to criticise, and to laugh at him for his jaded appearance, and to speak of him as they do of all white men (without distinction) as liars. These people are in the habit of seeing no white men in their country but Traders, and know of no other; deeming us all alike, and receiving us all under the presumption that we come to trade or barter; applying to us all, indiscriminately, the epithet of "liars" or Traders.

The reader will therefore see, that we mutually suffer in each other's estimation from the unfortunate ignorance, which distance has chained us in; and (as I can vouch, and the Indian also, who has visited the civilized world) that the historian who would record justly and correctly the character and customs of a people, must go and live among them.

LETTER—No. 12.

MANDAN VILLAGE, UPPER MISSOURI.

000 In my last, I gave some account of the village, and the customs, and appearances of this strange people,—and I will now proceed to give further details on that subject.

I have this morning, perched myself upon the top of one of the earth-covered lodges, which I have before described, and having the whole village beneath and about me (PLATE 47), with its sachems—its warriors—its dogs—and its horses in motion—its medicines (or mysteries) and scalp-poles waving over my head—its piquets—its green fields and prairies, and river in full view, with the din and bustle of the thrilling panorama that is about me. I shall be able, I hope, to give some sketches more to the life than I could have done from any effort of recollection.

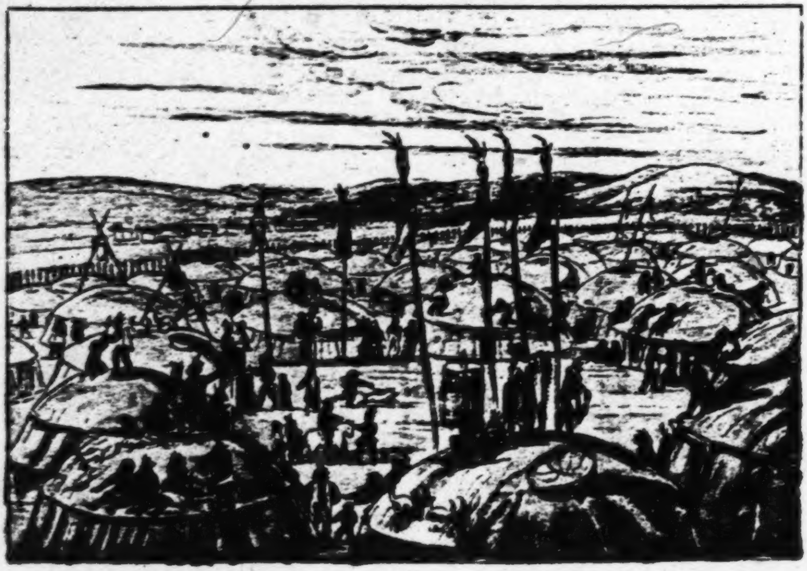
361 I said that [illegible]s or wigwams were covered with earth—were of forty or sixty feet in diameter, and so closely grouped that there was but just room enough to walk and ride between them,—that they had a door by which to enter them, and a hole in the top for the admission of light, and for the smoke to escape,—that the inmates were at times grouped upon their tops in conversations and other amusements, &c.; and yet you know not exactly how they look, nor what is the precise appearance of the strange world that is about me. There is really a newness and rudeness in every thing that is to be seen. There are several hundred houses or dwellings about me, and they are purely unique—they are all covered with dirt—the people are all red, and yet distinct from all other red folks I have seen. The horses are wild—every dog is a wolf—the whole moving mass are strangers to me: the living, in everything, carry an air of intractable wildness about them, and the dead are not buried, but dried upon scaffolds.

The groups of lodges around me present a very curious and pleasing appearance, resembling in shape (more nearly than anything else I can compare them to) so many potash-kettles inverted. On the tops of these are to
461 be seen groups standing and reclining, whose wild and picturesque appearance it would be difficult to describe. Stern warriors, like statues, standing in dignified groups, wrapped in their painted robes, with their heads decked and plumed with quills of the war-eagle; extending their long arms to

7: Catlin R, E-5 (1832-1840) 1857

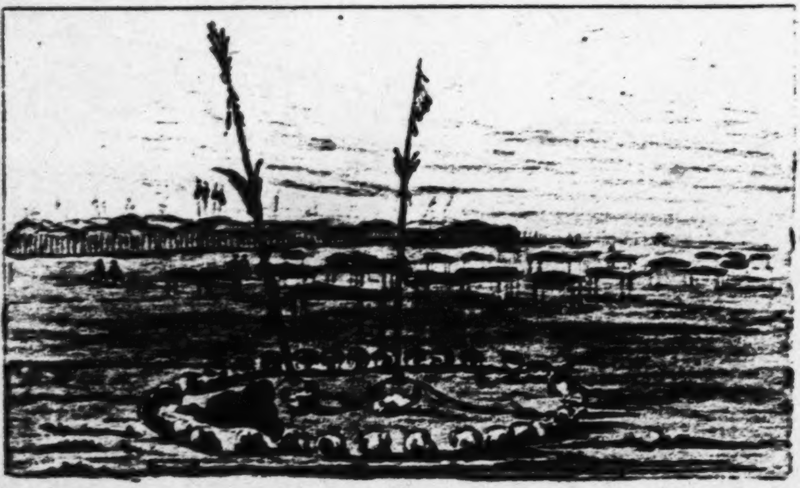
NQ17 Mandan NQ17

361



47

765
769



48

[facing p. 87]

461 the east or the west, the scenes of their battles, which they are recounting over to each other. In another direction, the wooing lover, softening the heart of his fair Taih-nah-tai-a with the notes of his simple lute. On other lodges, and beyond these, groups are engaged in games of the "moccasin," or the "platter." Some are to be seen manufacturing robes and dresses, and others, fatigued with amusements or occupations, have stretched their limbs to enjoy the luxury of sleep, whilst basking in the sun. With all this wild and varied medley of living beings are mixed their dogs, which seem to be so near an Indian's heart, as almost to constitute a material link of his existence.

361 778 In the centre of the village is an open space, or public area, of 150 feet in diameter, and circular in form, which is used for all public games and festivals, shews and exhibitions; and also for their "annual religious ceremonies," which are soon to take place, and of which I shall hereafter give some account. The lodges around this open space front in, with their doors towards the centre; and in the middle of this circle stands an object of great religious veneration, as I am told, on account of the importance it has in the conduction of those annual religious rites.

778 This object is in form of a large hogshead, some eight or ten feet high, made of planks and hoops, containing within it some of their choicest medicines or mysteries, and religiously preserved unhacked or scratched, as a symbol of the "Big Canoe," as they call it.

One of the lodges fronting on this circular area, and facing this strange object of their superstition, is called the "Medicine Lodge," or council house. It is in this sacred building that these wonderful ceremonies, in commemoration of the flood, take place. I am told by the Traders that the cruelties of these scenes are frightful and abhorrent in the extreme; and that this huge wigwam, which is now closed, has been built exclusively for this grand celebration. I am every day reminded of the near approach of the season for this strange affair, and as I have not yet seen any thing of it, I cannot describe it; I know it only from the relations of the Traders who have witnessed parts of it; and their descriptions are of so extraordinary a character, that I would not be willing to describe until I can see for myself, —which will, in all probability, be in a few days.

351 778 In ranging the eye over the village from where I am writing, there is presented to the view the strangest mixture and medley of unintelligible trash (independant of the living beings that are in motion), that can possibly be imagined. On the roofs of the lodges, besides the groups of living, are buffaloes' skulls, skin canoes, pots and pottery; sleds and sledges—and suspended on poles, erected some twenty feet above the doors of their wigwams, are displayed in a pleasant day, the scalps of warriors, preserved as trophies; and thus proudly exposed as evidence of their warlike deeds. In other parts are raised on poles the warriors' pure and whitened shields and quivers, with medicine-bags attached; and here and there a sacrifice of red

cloth, or other costly stuff, offered up to the Great Spirit, over the door of 351
some benignant chief, in humble gratitude for the blessings which he is 778
enjoying. Such is a part of the strange medley that is before and around me; and amidst them and the blue streams of smoke that are rising from the tops of these hundred "coal-pits," can be seen in distance, the green and boundless, treeless, bushless prairie; and on it, and contiguous to the piquet which encloses the village, a hundred scaffolds, on which their "dead live," as they term it.

These people never bury the dead, but place the bodies on slight scaffolds 764
just above the reach of human hands, and out of the way of wolves and dogs; and they are there left to moulder and decay. This cemetery, or place of deposite for the dead, is just back of the village, on a level prairie (PLATE 48); and with all its appearances, history, forms, ceremonies, &c. is one of the strangest and most interesting objects to be described in the vicinity of this peculiar race.

Whenever a person dies in the Mandan village, and the customary honours and condolence are paid to his remains, and the body dressed in its best attire, painted, oiled, feasted, and supplied with bow and quiver, shield, pipe and tobacco—knife, flint and steel, and provisions enough to last him a few days on the journey which he is to perform; a fresh buffalo's skin, just taken from the animal's back, is wrapped around the body, and tightly bound and wound with thongs of raw hide from head to foot. Then other robes are soaked in water, till they are quite soft and elastic, which are also bandaged around the body in the same manner, and tied fast with thongs, which are wound with great care and exactness, so as to exclude the action of the air from all parts of the body.

There is then a separate scaffold erected for it, constructed of four upright posts, a little higher than human hands can reach; and on the tops of these are small poles passing around from one post to the others; across which a number of willow-rods just strong enough to support the body, which is laid upon them on its back, with its feet carefully presented towards the rising sun.

There are a great number of these bodies resting exactly in a similar way; excepting in some instances where a chief, or medicine-man, may be seen with a few yards of scarlet or blue cloth spread over his remains, as a mark of public respect and esteem. Some hundreds of these bodies may be seen reposing in this manner in this curious place, which the Indians call, "the
village of the dead;" and the traveller, who visits this country to study and 000
learn, will not only be struck with the novel appearance of the scene; but if he will give attention to the respect and devotions that are paid to this sacred place, he will draw many a moral deduction that will last him through life: he will learn, at least, that filial, conjugal, and paternal affection are not necessarily the results of civilization; but that the Great Spirit has given them to man in his native state; and that the

060 spices and improvements of the enlightened world have never refined upon them.

There is not a day in the year in which one may not see in this place evidences of this fact, that will wring tears from his eyes, and kindle in his bosom a spark of respect and sympathy for the poor Indian, if he never felt

765 it before. Fathers, mothers, wives, and children, may be seen lying under these scaffolds, prostrated upon the ground, with their faces in the dirt, howling forth incessantly the most piteous and heart-broken cries and lamentations for the misfortunes of their kindred; tearing their hair—cutting their flesh with their knives, and doing other penance to appease the spirits of the dead, whose misfortunes they attribute to some sin or omission of their own, for which they sometimes inflict the most excruciating self-torture.

When the scaffolds on which the bodies rest, decay and fall to the ground, the nearest relations having buried the rest of the bones, take the skulls, which are perfectly bleached and purified, and place them in circles of an hundred or more on the prairie—placed at equal distances apart (some eight or nine inches from each other), with the faces all looking to the centre; where they are religiously protected and preserved in their precise positions from year to year, as objects of religious and affectionate veneration (PLATE 48).

765 There are several of these "Golgothas" or circles of twenty or thirty feet in diameter, and in the centre of each ring or circle is a little mound of

769 three feet high, on which uniformly rest two buffalo skulls (a male and female); and in the centre of the little mound is erected a "medicine pole," about twenty feet high, supporting many curious articles of mystery and superstition, which they suppose have the power of guarding and protecting this sacred arrangement. Here then, to this strange place do these people again resort, to evince their further affections for the dead—not in groans and lamentations however, for several years have cured the anguish; but fond affections and endearments are here renewed, and conversations are here held and cherished with the dead.

Each one of these skulls is placed upon a bunch of wild sage, which has been pulled and placed under it. The wife knows (by some mark or resemblance) the skull of her husband or her child, which lies in this group; and there seldom passes a day that she does not visit it, with a dish of the best cooked food that her wigwam affords, which she sets before the skull at night, and returns for the dish in the morning. As soon as it is discovered that the sage on which the skull rests is beginning to decay, the woman cuts a fresh bunch, and places the skull carefully upon it, removing that which was under it.

769 Independent of the above-named duties, which draw the women to this spot, they visit it from inclination, and linger upon it to hold converse and company with the dead. There is scarcely an hour in a pleasant day, but

more or less of these women may be seen sitting or laying by the skull of their child or husband—talking to it in the most pleasant and endearing language that they can use (as they were wont to do in former days) and seemingly getting an answer back. It is not unfrequently the case, that the woman brings her needle-work with her, spending the greater part of the day, sitting by the side of the skull of her child, chatting incessantly with it, while she is embroidering or garnishing a pair of moccasins; and perhaps, overcome with fatigue, falls asleep, with her arms encircled around it, forgetting herself for hours; after which she gathers up her things and returns to the village. 769

There is something exceedingly interesting and impressive in these scenes, which are so strikingly dissimilar, and yet within a few rods of each other; the one is the place where they pour forth the frantic anguish of their souls—and afterwards pay their visits to the other, to jest and gossip with the dead. 000

The great variety of shapes and characters exhibited in these groups of crania, render them a very interesting study for the craniologist and phrenologist; but I apprehend that it would be a matter of great difficulty (if not of impossibility) to procure them at this time, for the use and benefit of the scientific world.

LETTER—No. 13.

MANDAN VILLAGE, UPPER MISSOURI.

622 In several of my former Letters I have given sketches of the village, and some few of the customs of these peculiar people; and I have many more yet in store; some of which will induce the readers to laugh, and others almost dispose them to weep. But at present, I drop them, and introduce a few of the wild and gentlemanly Mandans themselves; and first, Ha-na-tah-nu-mauh, the wolf chief (PLATE 49). This man is head-chief of the nation, and familiarly known by the name of "Chef de Loup," as the French Traders call him; a haughty, austere, and overbearing man, respected and feared by his people rather than loved. The tenure by which this man holds his office, is that by which the head-chiefs of most of the tribes claim, that of inheritance. It is a general, though not an infallible rule amongst the numerous tribes of North American Indians, that the office of chief belongs to the eldest son of a chief; provided he shews himself, by his conduct, to be equally worthy of it as any other in the nation: making it hereditary on a very proper condition—in default of which requisites, or others which may happen, the office is elective.

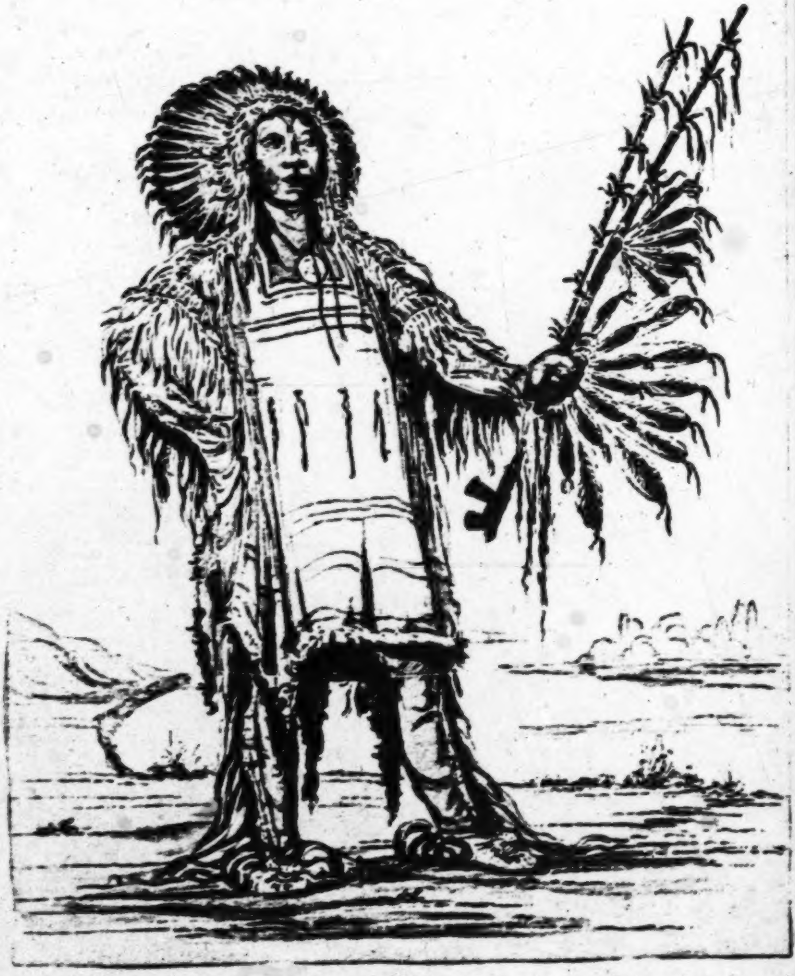
The dress of this chief was one of great extravagance, and some beauty; manufactured of skins, and a great number of quills of the raven, forming his stylish head-dress.

The next and second chief of the tribe, is Mah-to-toh-pa (the four bears). This extraordinary man, though second in office is undoubtedly the first and most popular man in the nation. Free, generous, elegant and gentlemanly in his deportment—handsome, brave and valiant; wearing a robe on his back, with the history of his battles emblazoned on it; which would fill a book of themselves, if properly translated. This, readers, is the most extraordinary man, perhaps, who lives at this day, in the atmosphere of Nature' noblemen; and I shall certainly tell you more of him anon.

After him, there are Mah-tahp-ta-ha, he who rushes through the midd (PLATE 50); Seehk-hee-da, the mouse-coloured feather (PLATE 51); San ja-ka-ko-kah (the deceiving wolf); Mah-to-he-ha (the old bear), an others, distinguished as chiefs and warriors—and there are belles also; 623 such as Mi-neek-e-sunk-te-ca, the mink (PLATE 53); and the little gray-haired Sha-ko-ka, mint (PLATE 52); and fifty others, who are famous for

7: Catlin R, E-5 (1832-1840) 1857
NQ17 Mandan NQ17

292

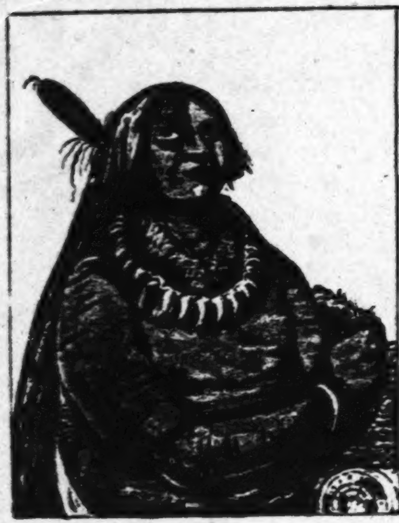


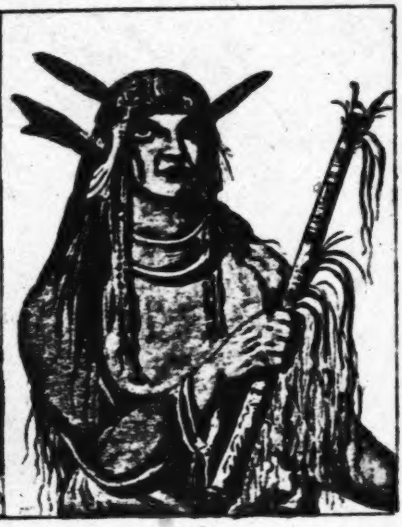
19

[p. 92 (A)]

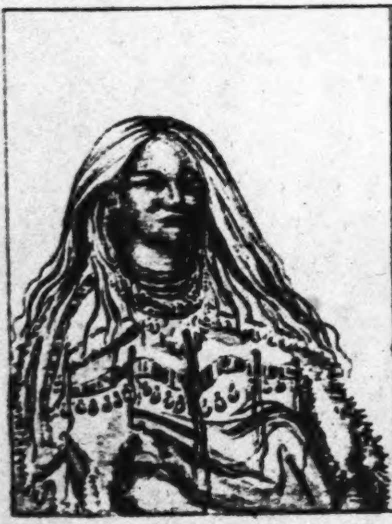
7: Catlin R, E-5 (1832-1840) 1857
NQ17 Mandan NQ17

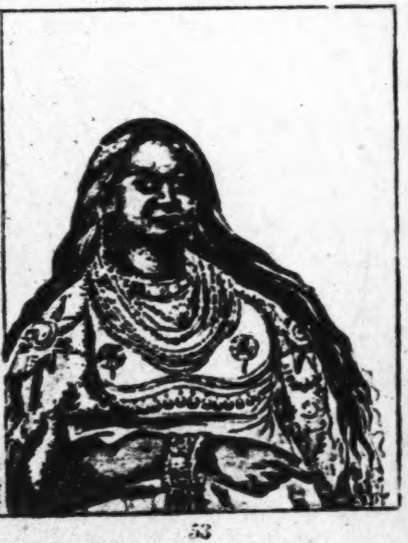
292


50


51

292


52


53

[p. 92 (B)]

000 their conquests, not with the bow or the javelin, but with their small black eyes, which shoot out from under their unfledged brows, and pierce the boldest, fiercest chieftain to the heart.

181 721 The Mandans are certainly a very interesting and pleasing people in their personal appearance and manners; differing in many respects, both in looks and customs, from all other tribes which I have seen. They are not a warlike people; for they seldom, if ever, carry war into their enemies' country; but when invaded, shew their valour and courage to be equal to that of any people on earth. Being a small tribe, and unable to contend on the wide prairies with the Sioux and other roaming tribes, who are ten times more numerous; they have very judiciously located themselves in a permanent village, which is strongly fortified, and ensures their preservation. 181 By this means they have advanced further in the arts of manufacture; have supplied their lodges more abundantly with the comforts, and even luxuries of life, than any Indian nation I know of. The consequence of this is, that this tribe have taken many steps ahead of other tribes in manners and refinements (if I may be allowed to apply the word refinement to Indian life); and are therefore familiarly (and correctly) denominated, by the Traders and others, who have been amongst them, "the polite and friendly Mandans."

There is certainly great justice in the remark; and so forcibly have I been struck with the peculiar ease and elegance of these people, together with the diversity of complexions, the various colours of their hair and eyes; the singularity of their language, and their peculiar and unaccountable customs, that I am fully convinced that they have sprung from some other origin than that of the other North American tribes, or that they are an amalgam of natives with some civilized race.

Here arises a question of very great interest and importance for discussion; and, after further familiarity with their character, customs, and traditions, if I forget it not, I will eventually give it further consideration. Suffice it then, for the present, that their *personal appearance* alone, independant of their modes and customs, pronounces them at once, as more or less, than savage.

142. A stranger in the Mandan village is first struck with the different shades of complexion, and various colours of hair which he sees in a crowd about him; and is at once almost disposed to exclaim that "these are not Indians."

There are a great many of these people whose complexions appear as light as half breeds; and amongst the women particularly, there are many whose skins are almost white, with the most pleasing symmetry and proportion of features; with hazel, with grey, and with blue eyes,—with mildness and sweetness of expression, and excessive modesty of demeanour, which render them exceedingly pleasing and beautiful.

Why this diversity of complexion I cannot tell, nor can they themselves

142 account for it. Their traditions, so far as I have yet learned them, afford us no information of their having had any knowledge of white men before the visit of Lewis and Clarke, made to their village thirty-three years ago Since that time there have been but very few visits from white men to this place, and surely not enough to have changed the complexions and the customs of a nation. And I recollect perfectly well that Governor Clarke told me, before I started for this place, that I would find the Mandans a strange people and half white.

The diversity in the colour of hair is also equally as great as that in the complexion; for in a numerous group of these people (and more particularly amongst the females, who never take pains to change its natural colour, as the men often do), there may be seen every shade and colour of hair that can be seen in our own country, with the exception of red or auburn, which is not to be found.

And there is yet one more strange and unaccountable peculiarity, which can probably be seen nowhere else on earth; nor on any rational grounds accounted for,—other than it is a freak or order of Nature, for which she has not seen fit to assign a reason. There are very many, of both sexes, and of every age, from infancy to manhood and old age, with hair of a bright silvery grey; and in some instances almost perfectly white.

This singular and eccentric appearance is much oftener seen among the women than it is with the men; for many of the latter who have it, seem [302] ashamed of it, and artfully conceal it, by filling their hair with glue and black and red earth. The women, on the other hand, seem proud of it, and display it often in an almost incredible profusion, which spreads over their shoulders and falls as low as the knee. I have ascertained, on a careful enquiry, that about one in ten or twelve of the whole tribe are what the French call "cheveux gris," or greyhairs; and that this strange and unaccountable phenomenon is not the result of disease or habit; but that it is unquestionably a hereditary character which runs in families, and indicates no inequality in disposition or intellect. And by passing this hair through my hands, as I often have, I have found it uniformly to be as coarse and harsh as a horse's mane; differing materially from the hair of other colours, which amongst the Mandans, is generally as fine and as soft as silk.

The reader will at once see, by the above facts, that there is enough upon the faces and heads of these people to stamp them peculiar,—when he meets them in the heart of this almost boundless wilderness, presenting such diversities of colour in the complexion and hair; when he knows from what he has seen, and what he has read, that all other primitive tribes known in America, are dark copper-coloured, with jet black hair.

cco From these few facts alone, the reader will see that I am amongst a strange and interesting people, and know how to pardon me, if I lead him through a maze of novelty and mysteries to the knowledge of a strange, yet kind and hospitable, people, whose fate, like that of all their race is sealed;—

000 whose doom is fixed, to live just long enough to be imperfectly known, and then to fall before the fell disease or sword of civilizing devastation.

141 The stature of the Mandans is rather below the ordinary size of man, with beautiful symmetry of form and proportion, and wonderful suppleness and elasticity; they are pleasingly erect and graceful, both in their walk and their attitudes; and the hair of the men, which generally spreads over their backs, 302 falling down to the hams, and sometimes to the ground, is divided into plaits or slabs of two inches in width, and filled with a profusion of glue and red earth or vermillion, at intervals of an inch or two, which becoming very hard, remains in and unchanged from year to year.

This mode of dressing the hair is curious, and gives to the Mandans the most singular appearance. The hair of the men is uniformly all laid over from the forehead backwards; carefully kept above and resting on the ear, and thence falling down over the back, in these flattened bunches, and painted red, extending oftentimes quite on to the calf of the leg, and sometimes in such profusion as almost to conceal the whole figure from the person walking behind them. In the portrait of San-ja-ka-ko-kah (the deceiving wolf, PLATE 54), where he is represented at full length, with several others of his family around him in a group, there will be seen a fair illustration of these and other customs of these people.

The hair of the women is also worn as long as they can possibly cultivate it, oiled very often, which preserves on it a beautiful gloss and shows its natural colour. They often braid it in two large plaits, one falling down just back of the ear, on each side of the head; and on any occasion which requires them to "put on their best looks," they pass their fingers through it, drawing it out of braid, and spreading it over their shoulders. The Mandan women observe strictly the same custom, which I observed amongst the Crows and Blackfeet (and, in fact, all other tribes I have seen, without a single exception), of parting the hair on the forehead, and always keeping the crease or separation filled with vermilion or other red paint. This is one of the very few little (and apparently trivial) customs which I have found amongst the Indians, without being able to assign any cause for it, other than that "they are Indians," and that this is an Indian fashion.

302
765 In mourning, like the Crows and most other tribes, the women are obliged to crop their hair all off; and the usual term of that condolence is until the hair has grown again to its former length

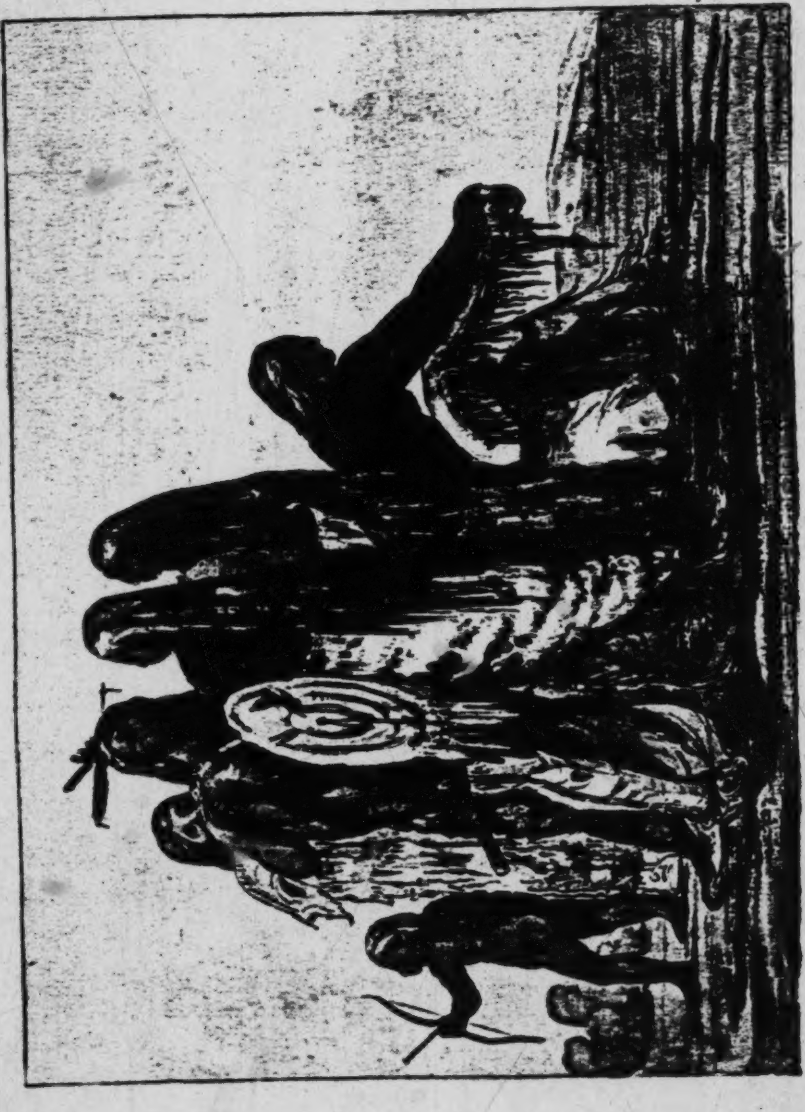
When a man mourns for the death of a near relation the case is quite different; his long, valued tresses, are of much greater importance, and only a lock or two can be spared. Just enough to tell of his grief to his friends, without destroying his most valued ornament, is doing just reverence and respect to the dead.

000 To repeat what I have said before, the Mandans are a pleasing and friendly race of people, of whom it is proverbial amongst the Traders and all who ever have known them that their treatment of white men in their

7: Catlin R, E-5 (1832-1840) 1857
NQ17 Mandan NQ17

29

292



54

[facing p. 95]

000 country has been friendly and kind ever since their first acquaintance with them—they have ever met and received them, on the prairie or in their villages, with hospitality and honour.

515 They are handsome, straight and elegant in their forms—not tall, but quick and graceful; easy and polite in their manners, neat in their persons and beautifully clad. When I say "neat in person and beautifully clad," however, I do not intend my readers to understand that such is the case with them all, for among them and most other tribes, as with the enlightened world, there are different grades of society—those who care but little for their personal appearance, and those who take great pains to please themselves and their friends. Amongst this class of personages, such as chiefs and braves, or warriors of distinction, and their families, and dandies or exquisites (a class of beings of whom I shall take due time to speak in a future Letter), the strictest regard to decency, and cleanliness and elegance of dress is observed; and there are few people, perhaps, who take more pains to keep their persons neat and cleanly than they do.

At the distance of half a mile or so above the village, is the customary place where the women and girls resort every morning in the summer months, to bathe in the river. To this spot they repair by hundreds, every morning at sunrise, where, on a beautiful beach, they can be seen running and glistening in the sun, whilst they are playing their innocent gambols and leaping into the stream. [481] They all learn to swim well, and the poorest swimmer amongst them will dash fearlessly into the boiling and eddying current of the Missouri, and cross it with perfect ease. At the distance of a quarter of a mile back from the river, extends a terrace or elevated prairie, running north from the village, and forming a kind of semicircle around this bathing-place; and on this terrace, which is some twenty or thirty feet higher than the meadow between it and the river, are stationed every morning several sentinels, with their bows and arrows in hand, to guard and protect this sacred ground from the approach of boys or men from any directions.

At a little distance below the village, also, is the place where the men and boys go to bathe and learn to swim. After this morning ablution, they return to their village, wipe their limbs dry, and use a profusion of bear's grease through their hair and over their bodies.

000 The art of swimming is known to all the American Indians; and perhaps no people on earth have taken more pains to learn it, nor any who turn it to better account. There certainly are no people whose avocations of life more often call for the use of their limbs in this way; as many of the tribes spend their lives on the shores of our vast lakes and rivers, paddling about from their childhood in their fragile bark canoes, which are liable to continual accidents, which often throw the Indian upon his natural resources for the preservation of his life.

There are many times also, when out upon their long marches in the prosecution of their almost continued warfare, when it becomes necessary to

plunge into and swim across the wildest streams and rivers, at times when 000
they have no canoes or craft in which to cross them. I have as yet seen no tribe where this art is neglected. It is learned at a very early age by both sexes, and enables the strong and hardy muscles of the squaws to take their child upon the back, and successfully to pass any river that lies in their way.

The mode of swimming amongst the Mandans, as well as amongst most 481
of the other tribes, is quite different from that practiced in those parts of the civilized world, which I have had the pleasure yet to visit. The Indian, instead of parting his hands simultaneously under the chin, and making the stroke outward, in a horizontal direction, causing thereby a serious strain upon the chest, throws his body alternately upon the left and the right side, raising one arm entirely above the water and reaching as far forward as he can, to dip it, whilst his whole weight and force are spent upon the one that is passing under him, and like a paddle propelling him along; whilst this arm is making a half circle, and is being raised out of the water behind him, the opposite arm is describing a similar arcl. in the air over his head, to be dipped in the water as far as he can reach before him, with the hand turned under, forming a sort of bucket, to act most effectively as it passes in its turn underneath him.

By this bold and powerful mode of swimming, which may want the grace that many would wish to see, I am quite sure, from the experience I have had, that much of the fatigue and strain upon the breast and spine are avoided, and that a man will preserve his strength and his breath much longer in this alternate and rolling motion, than he can in the usual mode of swimming, in the polished world.

In addition to the modes of bathing which I have above described, the 515
Mandans have another, which is a much greater luxury, and often resorted 343
to by the sick, but far more often by the well and sound, as a matter of
luxury only, or perhaps for the purpose of hardening their limbs and preparing 757
them for the thousand exposures and vicissitudes of life to which they are continually liable. I allude to their vapour baths, or *sudatories*, of which each village has several, and which seem to be a kind of public property—accessible to all, and resorted to by all, male and female, old and young, sick and well.

In every Mandan lodge is to be seen a crib or basket, much in the shape 352
of a bathing-tub, curiously woven with willow boughs, and sufficiently large 515
to receive any person of the family in a reclining or recumbent posture; which, when any one is to take a bath, is carried by the squaw to the sudatory for the purpose, and brought back to the wigwam again after it has been used

These sudatories are always near the village, above or below it, on the 515
bank of the river. They are generally built of skins (in form of a Crow 343
or Sioux lodge which I have before described), covered with buffalo skins 757

515 343 757 sewed tight together, with a kind of furnace in the centre; or in other words, in the centre of the lodge are two walls of stone about six feet long and two and a half apart, and about three feet high; across and over this space, between the two walls, are laid a number of round sticks, on which the bathing crib is placed (vide PLATE 71). Contiguous to the lodge, and outside of it, is a little furnace something similar, in the side of the bank, where the woman kindles a hot fire, and heats to a red heat a number of large stones, which are kept at these places for this particular purpose; and having them all in readiness, she goes home or sends word to inform her husband or other one who is waiting, that all is ready; when he makes his appearance entirely naked, though with a large buffalo robe wrapped around him. He then enters the lodge and places himself in the crib or basket, either on his back or in a sitting posture (the latter of which is generally preferred), with his back towards the door of the lodge; when the squaw brings in a large stone red hot, between two sticks (lashed together somewhat in the form of a pair of tongs) and, placing it under him, throws cold water upon it, which raises a profusion of vapour about him. He is at once enveloped in a cloud of steam, and a woman or child will sit at a little distance and continue to dash water upon the stone, whilst the matron of the lodge is out, and preparing to make her appearance with another heated stone: or he will sit and dip from a wooden bowl, with a ladle made of the mountain-sheep's horn, and throw upon the heated stones, with his own hands, the water which he is drawing through his lungs and pores, in the next moment, in the most delectable and exhilarating vapours, as it distils through the mat of wild sage and other medicinal and aromatic herbs, which he has strewed over the bottom of his basket, and on which he reclines.

515 757 During all this time the lodge is shut perfectly tight, and he quaffs this delicious and renovating draught to his lungs with deep drawn sighs, and with extended nostrils, until he is drenched in the most profuse degree of perspiration that can be produced; when he makes a kind of strangled signal, at which the lodge is opened, and he darts forth with the speed of a frightened deer, and plunges headlong into the river, from which he instantly escapes again, wraps his robe around him and "leans" as fast as possible for home. Here his limbs are wiped dry, and wrapped close and tight within the fur of the buffalo robes, in which he takes his nap, with his feet to the fire; then oils his limbs and hair with bear's grease, dresses and plumes himself for a visit—a feast—a parade, or a council; or slicks down his long hair, and rubs his oiled limbs to a polish, with a piece of soft buckskin, prepared to join in games of ball or Tchung-kee.

757 Such is the sudatory or the vapour bath of the Mandans, and, as I before observed, it is resorted to both as an every-day luxury by those who have the time and energy or industry to indulge in it; and also used by the sick as a remedy for nearly all the diseases which are known amongst them.

Fevers are very rare, and in fact almost unknown amongst these people: but in the few cases of fever which have been known, this treatment has been applied, and without the fatal consequences which we would naturally predict. The greater part of their diseases are inflammatory rheumatisms, and other chronic diseases; and for these, this mode of treatment, with their modes of life, does admirably well. This custom is similar amongst nearly all of these Missouri Indians, and amongst the Pawnees, Omahas, and Punchas and other tribes, who have suffered with the small-pox (the dread destroyer of the Indian race), this mode was practiced by the poor creatures, who fled by hundreds to the river's edge, and by hundreds died before they could escape from the waves, into which they had plunged in the heat and rage of a burning fever. Such will yet be the scourge, and such the misery of these poor unthinking people, and each tribe to the Rocky Mountains, as it has been with every tribe between here and the Atlantic Ocean. White men—whiskey—tomahawks—scalping knives—guns, powder and ball—small-pox—debauchery—extermination.

LETTER No. 14.

MANDAN VILLAGE, UPPER MISSOURI.

291 171 The Mandans in many instances dress very neatly, and some of them splendidly. As they are in their native state, their dresses are all of their own manufacture; and of course, altogether made of skins of different animals belonging to those regions. There is, certainly, a reigning and striking similarity of costume amongst most of the North Western tribes; and I cannot say that the dress of the Mandans is decidedly distinct from that of the Crows or the Blackfeet, the Assinneboins or the Sioux; yet there are modes of stitching or embroidering, in every tribe, which may at once enable the traveller, who is familiar with their modes, to detect or distinguish the dress of any tribe. These differences consist generally in the fashions of constructing the head-dress, or of garnishing their dresses with the porcupine quills, which they use in great profusion.

291 171 177 Amongst so many different and distinct nations, always at war with each other, and knowing nothing at all of each other's languages; and amongst whom, fashions in dress seldom if ever change; it may seem somewhat strange that we should find these people so nearly following, or imitating each other, in the forms and modes of their dress and ornaments. This must however, be admitted, and I think may be accounted for in a manner, without raising the least argument in favour of the theory of their having all sprung from one stock or one family; for in their continual warfare, when chiefs or warriors fall, their clothes and weapons usually fall into the possession of the victors, who wear them; and the rest of the tribe would naturally more or less often copy from or imitate them; and so also in their repeated councils or treaties of peace, such articles of dress and other manufactures are customarily exchanged, which are equally adopted by the other tribe; and consequently, eventually lead to the similarity which we find amongst the modes of dress, &c. of the different tribes.

291 The tunic or shirt of the Mandan men is very similar in shape to that of the Blackfeet—made of two skins of deer or mountain-sheep, strung with scalp-locks, beads, and ermine. The leggings, like those of the other tribes, of whom I have spoken, are made of deer skins, and shaped to fit the leg, embroidered with porcupine quills, and fringed with scalps from their enemies heads. Their moccasins are made of buckskin, and neatly ornamented

with porcupine quills—over their shoulders (or in other words, over one shoulder and passing under the other), they very gracefully wear a robe from the young buffalo's back, oftentimes cut down to about half its original size, to make it handy and easy for use. Many of these are also fringed on one side with scalp-locks; and the flesh side of the skin curiously ornamented with pictured representations of the creditable events and battles of their lives. 291

Their head-dresses are of various sorts, and many of them exceedingly picturesque and handsome; generally made of war-eagles' or ravens quills and ermine. These are the most costly part of an Indian's dress in all this country, owing to the difficulty of procuring the quills and the fur. The war-eagle being the "*rara avis*," and the ermine the rarest animal that is found in the country. The tail of a war-eagle in this village, provided it is a perfect one, containing some six or eight quills, which are denominated first-rate plumes, and suitable to arrange in a head-dress, will purchase a tolerable good horse (horses, however, are much cheaper here than they are in most other countries). I have had abundant opportunities of learning the great value which these people sometimes attach to such articles of dress and ornament, as I have been purchasing a great many, which I intend to exhibit in my Gallery of Indian Paintings, that the world may examine them for themselves, and thereby be enabled to judge of the fidelity of my works, and the ingenuity of Indian manufactures. 292 435

In these purchases I have often been surprised at the prices demanded by them; and perhaps I could not recite a better instance of the kind, than one which occurred here a few days since:—One of the chiefs, whom I had painted at full length, in a beautiful costume, with head-dress of war-eagles' quills and ermine, extending quite down to his feet; and whom I was soliciting for the purchase of his dress complete, was willing to sell to me all but the head-dress; saying, that "he could not part with that, as he would never be able to get quills and ermine of so good a quality to make another like it." I agreed with him, however, for the rest of the dress, and importuned him, from day to day, for the head-dress, until he at length replied, that, if I must have it, he must have two horses for it; the bargain was instantly struck—the horses were procured of the Traders at twenty-five dollars each, and the head-dress secured for my Collection.

There is occasionally, a chief or a warrior of so extraordinary renown, that he is allowed to wear horns on his head-dress, which give to his aspect a strange and majestic effect. These are made of about a third part of the horn of a buffalo bull; the horn having been split from end to end, and a third part of it taken and shaved thin and light, and highly polished. These are attached to the top of the head-dress on each side, in the same place that they rise and stand on the head of a buffalo; rising out of a mat 292

292 of ermine skins and tails, which hang over the top of the head-dress, somewhat in the form that the large and profuse locks of hair hang and fall over the head of a buffalo bull. See head-dress in PLATES 14, 64, and 91, of three different tribes.

800 The same custom I have found observed amongst the Sioux,—the Crows—the Blackfeet and Assinneboins, and it is one of so striking a character as needs a few more words of observation. There is a peculiar meaning or importance (in their estimation) to this and many other curious and unaccountable appearances in the habits of Indians, upon which the world generally look as things that are absurd and ridiculous, merely because they are beyond the world's comprehension, or because we do not stop to enquire or learn their uses or meaning.

I find that the principal cause why we underrate and despise the savage, is generally because we do not understand him; and the reason why we are ignorant of him and his modes, is that we do not stop to investigate—the world have been too much in the habit of looking upon him as altogether inferior—as a beast, a brute; and unworthy of more than a passing notice. If they stop long enough to form an acquaintance, it is but to take advantage of his ignorance and credulities—to rob him of the wealth and resources of his country;—to make him drunk with whiskey, and visit him with abuses which in his ignorance he never thought of. By this method his first visitors entirely overlook and never understand the meaning of his thousand interesting and characteristic customs; and at the same time, by changing his native modes and habits of life, blot them out from the view of the enquiring world for ever.

It is from the observance of a thousand little and apparently trivial modes and tricks of Indian life, that the Indian character must be learned; and, in fact, it is just the same with us if the subject were reversed: excepting that the system of civilized life would furnish ten apparently useless and ridiculous trifles to one which is found in Indian life; and at least twenty to one which are purely nonsensical and unmeaning.

The civilized world look upon a group of Indians, in their classic dress, with their few and simple oddities, all of which have their moral or meaning, and laugh at them excessively, because they are not like ourselves—we ask, "why do the silly creatures wear such great bunches of quills on their heads?—Such loads and streaks of paint upon their bodies—and bear's grease? abominable!" and a thousand other equally silly questions, without ever stopping to think that Nature taught them to do so—and that they all have some definite importance or meaning which an
292 Indian could explain to us at once, if he were asked and felt disposed to do so—that each quill in his head stood, in the eyes of his whole tribe, as the symbol of an enemy who had fallen by his hand—that every streak of red
302 paint covered a wound which he had got in honourable combat—and that the bear's grease with which he carefully anoints his body every morning, from

head to foot, cleanses and purifies the body, and protects his skin from the bite of musquitoes, and at the same time preserves him from colds and coughs which are usually taken through the pores of the skin. 302

At the same time, an Indian looks among the civilized world, no doubt, with equal, if not much greater, astonishment, at our apparently, as well as *really*, ridiculous customs and fashions; but he laughs not, nor ridicules, nor questions,—for his natural good sense and good manners forbid him,—until he is reclining about the fire-side of his wigwam companions, when he vents forth his just criticisms upon the learned world, who are a rich and just theme for Indian criticism and Indian gossip. 000

An Indian will not ask a white man the reason why he does not oil his skin with bears' grease, or why he does not paint his body—or why he wears a hat on his head, or why he has buttons on the back part of his coat, where they never can be used—or why he wears whiskers, and a shirt collar up to his eyes—or why he sleeps with his head towards the fire instead of his feet—why he walks with his toes out instead of turning them in—or why it is that hundreds of white folks will flock and crowd round a table to see an Indian eat—but he will go home to his wigwam fire-side, and "make the welkin ring" with jokes and fun upon the ignorance and folly of the knowing world.

A wild Indian thrown into the civilized atmosphere will see a man occasionally moving in society, wearing a cocked hat; and another with a laced coat and gold or silver epaulettes upon his shoulders, without knowing or enquiring the meaning of them, or the objects for which they are worn. Just so a white man travels amongst a wild and untaught tribe of Indians, and sees occasionally one of them parading about their village, with a head-dress of eagles' quills and ermine, and elevated above it a pair of beautifully polished buffalo horns; and just as ignorant is he also, of their meaning or importance; and more so, for the first will admit the presumption that epaulettes and cocked hats amongst the civilized world, are made for some important purpose,—but the latter will presume that horns on an Indian's head are nothing more nor less (nor can they be in their estimation), than Indian nonsense and stupidity.

This brings us to the "corned crest" again, and if the poor Indian scans epaulettes and cocked hats, without enquiring their meaning, and explaining them to his tribe, it is no reason why I should have associated with the noble dignitaries of these western regions, with horns and ermine on their heads, and then to have introduced the subject without giving some further clue to their importance and meaning. For me, this negligence would be doubly unpardonable, as I travel, not to *trade* but to *herald* the Indian and his dying customs to posterity. 292

This custom then, which I have before observed belongs to all the northwestern tribes, is one no doubt of very ancient origin, having a purely classic meaning. No one wears the head-dress surmounted with horns ex- [171]

292 cept the dignitaries who are very high in authority, and whose exceeding
valour, worth, and power is admitted by all the nation.

He may wear them, however, who is not a *chief;* but a brave, or
292 warrior of such remarkable character, that he is esteemed universally in the
554 tribe, as a man whose "voice is as loud in council" as that of a chief of the
first grade, and consequently his *power* as great.

This head-dress with horns is used only on certain occasions, and they are very seldom. When foreign chiefs, Indian agents, or other important personages visit a tribe; or at war parades, at the celebration of a victory, at public festivals, &c. they are worn; but on no other occasions—unless, sometimes, when a chief sees fit to lead a war-party to battle, he decorates his head with this symbol of power, to stimulate his men; and throws himself into the foremost of the battle, inviting his enemy to concentrate their shafts upon him.

The horns on these head-dresses are but loosely attached at the bottom, so that they easily fall back or forward, according as the head is inclined forward or backward; and by an ingenious motion of the head, which is so slight as to be almost imperceptible—they are made to balance to and fro, and sometimes, one backward and the other forward like a horse's ears, giving a vast deal of expression and force of character, to the appearance of the chief who is wearing them. This, reader, is a remarkable instance (like hundreds of others), for its striking similarity to *Jewish customs,* to the kerns (or keren, in Hebrew), the horns worn by the Abysinian chiefs and Hebrews, as a *symbol of power* and command; worn at great parades and celebrations of victories.

000 "The false prophet Zedekiah, made him horns of iron" (1 Kings xxii. 11).
"Lift not your horns on high; speak not with a stiff neck" (Ps. lxxv. 5).

This last citation seems so exactly to convey to my mind the mode of raising and changing the position of the horns by a motion of the head, as I have above described, that I am irresistibly led to believe that this custom is now practiced amongst these tribes very nearly as it was amongst the Jews; and that it has been, like many other customs of which I shall speak more in future epistles, handed down and preserved with very little innovation or change from that ancient people.

The reader will see this custom exemplified in the portrait of Mah-to-
292 toh-pa (PLATE 64). This man, although the second chief, was the only
554 man in the nation who was allowed to wear the horns; and all, I found,
looked upon him as the leader, who had the power to lead all the warriors in time of war; and that, in consequence of the extraordinary battles which he had fought.

LETTER—No. 15.

MANDAN VILLAGE, UPPER MISSOURI.

A WEEK or more has elapsed since the date of my last Letter, and nothing as yet of the great and curious event—or the *Mandan religious ceremony*. There is evidently much preparation making for it, however; and from what I can learn, no one in the nation, save the *medicine-men*, have any knowledge of the exact day on which it is to commence. I am informed by the chiefs, that it takes place as soon as the willow-tree is in full leaf; for, say they, "the twig which the bird brought in was a willow bough, and had full-grown leaves on it." So it seems that this celebration has some relation to the Flood. 796

This great occasion is close at hand, and will, undoubtedly, commence in a few days; in the meantime I will give a few notes and memorandums, which I have made since my last. 000

I have been continually at work with my brush, with fine and picturesque subjects before me; and from the strange, whimsical, and superstitious notions which they have of an art so novel and unaccountable to them, I have been initiated into many of their mysteries—have witnessed many very curious incidents, and preserved several anecdotes, some of which I must relate.

Perhaps nothing ever more completely astonished these people than the operations of my *brush*. The art of portrait-painting was a subject entirely new to them, and of course, unthought of; and my appearance here has commenced a new era in the arcana of *medicine* or mystery. Soon after arriving here, I commenced and finished the portraits of the two principal chiefs. This was done without having awakened the curiosity of the villagers, as they had heard nothing of what was going on, and even the chiefs themselves seemed to be ignorant of my designs, until the pictures were completed. No one else was admitted into my lodge during the operation; and when finished, it was exceedingly amusing to see them mutually recognizing each other's likeness, and assuring each other of the striking resemblance which they bore to the originals. Both of these pressed their hand over their mouths awhile in dead silence (a custom amongst most tribes, when anything surprises them very much); looking attentively upon the portraits and myself, and upon the palette and colours with which these unaccountable effects had been produced. 123

123 They then walked up to me in the most gentle manner, taking me in turn by the hand, with a firm grip; with head and eyes inclined downwards, and in a tone a little above a whisper—pronounced the words "te-ho-pe-nee Wash-ee!" and walked off.

Readers, at that moment I was christened with a new and a great name—one by which I am now familiarly hailed, and talked of in this village; and no doubt will be, as long as traditions last in this strange community.

That moment conferred an honour on me, which you as yet do not understand. I took the degree (not of Doctor of Laws, nor Bachelor of Arts) of Master of Arts—of mysteries—of magic, and of hocus pocus. I was recognized in that short sentence as a "great *medicine white man*;" and since that time, have been regularly installed *medicine* or mystery, which is the most honourable degree that could be conferred upon me here; and I now hold a place amongst the most eminent and envied personages, the doctors and conjurati of this titled community.

Te-ho-pe-nee Wash-ee (or medicine white man) is the name I now go by, and it will prove to me, no doubt, of more value than gold, for I have been called upon and feasted by the doctors, who are all mystery-men; and it has been an easy and successful passport already to many strange and mysterious places; and has put me in possession of a vast deal of curious and interesting information, which I am sure I never should have otherwise learned. I am daily growing in the estimation of the medicine-men and the chiefs; and by assuming all the gravity and circumspection due from so high a dignitary (and even considerably more); and endeavouring to perform now and then some art or trick that is unfathomable, I am in hopes of supporting my standing, until the great annual ceremony commences; on which occasion, I may possibly be allowed a seat in the *medicine-lodge* by the doctors, who are the sole conductors of this great source and fountain of all priestcraft and conjuration in this country.

After I had finished the portraits of the two chiefs, and they had returned to their wigwams, and deliberately seated themselves by their respective fire-sides, and silently smoked a pipe or two (according to an universal custom), they gradually began to tell what had taken place; and at length crowds of gaping listeners, with mouths wide open, thronged their lodges; and a throng of women and girls were about my house, and through every crack and crevice I could see their glistening eyes, which were piercing my hut in a hundred places, from a natural and restless propensity, a curiosity to see what was going on within. An hour or more passed in this way, and the soft and silken throng continually increased, until some hundreds of them were clung, and piled about my wigwam like a swarm of bees hanging on the front and sides of their hive.

During this time, not a man made his appearance about the premises—after awhile, however, they could be seen, folded in their robes, gradually *siding* up towards the lodge, with a silly look upon their faces, which confessed at once that curiosity was leading them reluctantly, where their pride checked 123 and forbade them to go. The rush soon after became general, and the chiefs and medicine-men took possession of my room, placing *soldiers* (braves with spears in their hands) at the door, admitting no one, but such as were allowed by the chiefs, to come in.

Monsr. Kipp (the agent of the Fur Company, who has lived here eight years, and to whom, for his politeness and hospitality, I am much indebted), at this time took a seat with the chiefs, and, speaking their language fluently, he explained to them my views and the objects for which I was painting these portraits; and also expounded to them the manner in which they were made,—at which they seemed all to be very much pleased. The necessity at this time of exposing the portraits to the view of the crowds who were assembled around the house, became imperative, and they were held up together over the door, so that the whole village had a chance to see and recognize their chiefs. The effect upon so mixed a multitude, who as yet had heard no way of accounting for them, was novel and really laughable. The likenesses were instantly recognized, and many of the gaping multitude commenced yelping; some were stamping off in the jarring dance—others were singing, and others again were crying—hundreds covered their mouths with their hands and were mute; others, indignant, drove their spears frightfully into the ground, and some threw a reddened arrow at the sun, and went home to their wigwams.

The pictures seen,—the next curiosity was to see the man who made them, 123
and I was called forth. Readers! if you have any imagination, save me 774
the trouble of painting this scene. * * * *
* * * I stepped forth, and was instantly hemmed in in the throng. Women were gaping and gazing—and warriors and braves were offering me their hands,—whilst little boys and girls, by dozens, were struggling through the crowd to touch me with the ends of their fingers; and whilst I was engaged, from the waist upwards, in fending off the throng and shaking hands, my legs were assailed (not unlike the nibbling of little fish, when I have been standing in deep water) by children, who were creeping between the legs of the bystanders for the curiosity or honour of touching me with the end of their finger. The eager curiosity and expression of astonishment with which they gazed upon me, plainly shewed that they looked upon me as some strange and unaccountable being They pronounced me the greatest *medicine-man* in the world; for they said I had made *living beings*,—they said they could see their chiefs alive, in two places—those that I had made were a *little* alive—they could see their eyes move—could see them smile and laugh, and that if they could laugh they could certainly speak, if they should try, and they must therefore have *some life* in them.

The squaws generally agreed, that they had discovered life enough in them to render my *medicine* too great for the Mandans; saying that such an

123
774
operation could not be performed without taking away from the original something of his existence, which I put in the picture, and they could see it move, could see it stir.

This curtailing of the natural existence, for the purpose of instilling life into the secondary one, they decided to be an useless and destructive operation, and one which was calculated to do great mischief in their happy community; and they commenced a mournful and doleful chaunt against me, crying and weeping bitterly through the village, proclaiming me a most "dangerous man; one who could make living persons by looking at them; and at the same time, could, as a matter of course, destroy life in the same way, if I chose. That my medicine was dangerous to their lives, and that I must leave the village immediately. That bad luck would happen to those whom I painted—that I was to take a part of the existence of those whom I painted, and carry it home with me amongst the white people, and that when they died they would never sleep quiet in their graves."

123
In this way the women and some old quack medicine-men together, had succeeded in raising an opposition against me; and the reasons they assigned were so plausible and so exactly suited for their superstitious feelings, that they completely succeeded in exciting fears and a general panic in the minds of a number of chiefs who had agreed to sit for their portraits, and my operations were, of course, for several days completely at a stand. A grave council was held on the subject from day to day, and there seemed great difficulty in deciding what was to be done with me and the dangerous art which I was practicing; and which had far exceeded their original expectations. I finally got admittance to their sacred conclave, and assured them that I was but a man like themselves,—that my art had no *medicine* or mystery about it, but could be learned by any of them if they would practice it as long as I had—that my intentions towards them were of the most friendly kind, and that in the country where I lived, brave men never allowed their squaws to frighten them with their foolish whims and stories. They all immediately arose, shook me by the hand, and dressed themselves for their pictures. After this, there was no further difficulty about sitting; all were ready to be painted,—the squaws were silent, and my painting-room a continual resort for the chiefs, and braves, and medicine-men; where they waited with impatience for the completion of each one's picture,—that they could decide as to the likeness as it came from under the brush; that they could laugh, and yell, and sing a new song, and smoke a fresh pipe to the health and success of him who had just been safely delivered from the hands and the mystic operation of the "*white medicine.*"

In each of these operations, as they successfully took place, I observed that a pipe or two were well filled, and as soon as I commenced painting, the chiefs and braves, who sat around the sides of the lodge, commenced smoking for the success of the picture (and probably as much or more so for the safe deliverance of the sitter from harm while under the operation);

and so they continued to pass the pipe around until the portrait was completed. 123

In this way I progressed with my portraits, stopping occasionally very suddenly as if something was wrong, and taking a tremendous puff or two at the pipe, and streaming the smoke through my nostrils, exhibiting in my looks and actions an evident relief; enabling me to proceed with more facility and success,—by flattering and complimenting each one on his good looks after I had got it done, and taking them according to rank, or standing, making it a matter of honour with them, which pleased them exceedingly, and gave me and my art the stamp of respectability at once.

I was then taken by the arm by the chiefs, and led to their lodges, where feasts were prepared for me in elegant style, *i. e.* in the best manner which this country affords; and being led by the arm, and welcomed to them by *gentlemen* of high and exalted feelings, rendered them in my estimation truly elegant.

I was waited upon in due form and ceremony by the *medicine-men*, who received me upon the old adage, "Similis simili gaudet." I was invited to a feast, and they presented me a *she-shee-quoi*, or a doctor's rattle, and also a magical wand, or a doctor's staff, strung with claws of the grizzly bear, with hoofs of the antelope—with ermine—with wild sage and bat's wings—and perfumed withal with the *choice* and *savoury* odour of the pole-cat—a dog was sacrificed and hung by the legs over my wigwam, and I was therefore and thereby initiated into (and countenanced in the practice of) the arcana of medicine or mystery, and considered a Fellow of the Extraordinary Society of *Conjurati*. 123 791

Since this signal success and good fortune in my operations, things have gone on very pleasantly, and I have had a great deal of amusement. Some altercation has taken place, however, amongst the chiefs and braves, with regard to standing or rank, of which they are exceedingly jealous; and they must sit (if at all) in regular order, according to that rank; the trouble is all settled at last, however, and I have had no want of subjects, though a great many have become again alarmed, and are unwilling to sit, for fear, as some say, that they will die prematurely if painted; and as others say, that if they are painted, the picture will live after they are dead, and they cannot sleep quiet in their graves. 123 774

I have had several most remarkable occurrences in my painting-room, of this kind, which have made me some everlasting enemies here; though the minds and feelings of the chiefs and medicine-men have not been affected by them. There has been three or four instances where proud and aspiring young men have been in my lodge, and after gazing at the portraits of the head chief across the room (which sits looking them in the eyes), have raised their hands before their faces and walked around to the side of the lodge, on the right or left, from whence to take a long and fair side-look at the chief, instead of staring him full in the face (which is a most unpardonable offence

123 774 in all Indian tribes); and after having got in that position, and cast their eyes again upon the portrait which was yet looking them full in the face, have thrown their robes over their heads and bolted out of the wigwam, filled equally with astonishment and indignation; averring, as they always will in a sullen mood, that they "saw the eyes move,"—that as they walked around the room "the eyes of the portrait followed them." With these unfortunate gentlemen, repeated efforts have been made by the Traders, and also by the chiefs and doctors, who understand the illusion, to convince them of their error, by explaining the mystery; but they will not hear to any explanation whatever; saying, that "what they see with their eyes is always evidence enough for them;" that they always "believe their own eyes sooner than a hundred tongues," and all efforts to get them a second time to my room, or into my company in any place, have proved entirely unsuccessful.

123 791 I had trouble brewing also the other day from another source; one of the "*medicines*" commenced howling and haranguing around my domicil, amongst the throng that was outside, proclaiming that all who were inside and being painted were fools and would soon die; and very materially affecting thereby my popularity. I however sent for him and called him in the next morning, when I was alone, having only the interpreter with me; telling him that I had had my eye upon him for several days, and had been so well pleased with his looks, that I had taken great pains to find out his history, which had been explained by all as one of a most extraordinary kind, and his character and standing in his tribe as worthy of my particular notice; and that I had several days since resolved that as soon as I had practiced my hand long enough upon the others, to get the stiffness out of it (after paddling my canoe so far as I had) and make it to work easily and successfully, I would begin on his portrait, which I was then prepared to commence on that day, and that I felt as if I could do him justice. He shook me by the hand, giving me the "Doctor's grip," and beckoned me to sit down, which I did, and we smoked a pipe together. After this was over, he told me, that "he had no inimical feelings towards me, although he had been telling the chiefs that they were all fools, and all would die who had their portraits painted—that although he had set the old women and children all crying, and even made some of the young warriors tremble, yet he had no unfriendly feelings towards me, nor any fear or dread of my art." "I know you are a good man (said he), I know you will do no harm to any one, your medicine is great and you are a great 'medicine-man.' I would like to see myself very well—and so would all of the chiefs; but they have all been many days in this medicine-house, and they all know me well, and they have not asked me to come in and be *made alive* with paints—my friend, I am glad that my people have told you who I am—my heart is glad—I will go to my wigwam and eat, and in a little while I will come, and you may go to work;"—another pipe was lit and smoked, and he got up and went off. I prepared my canvass and pa-

123
791

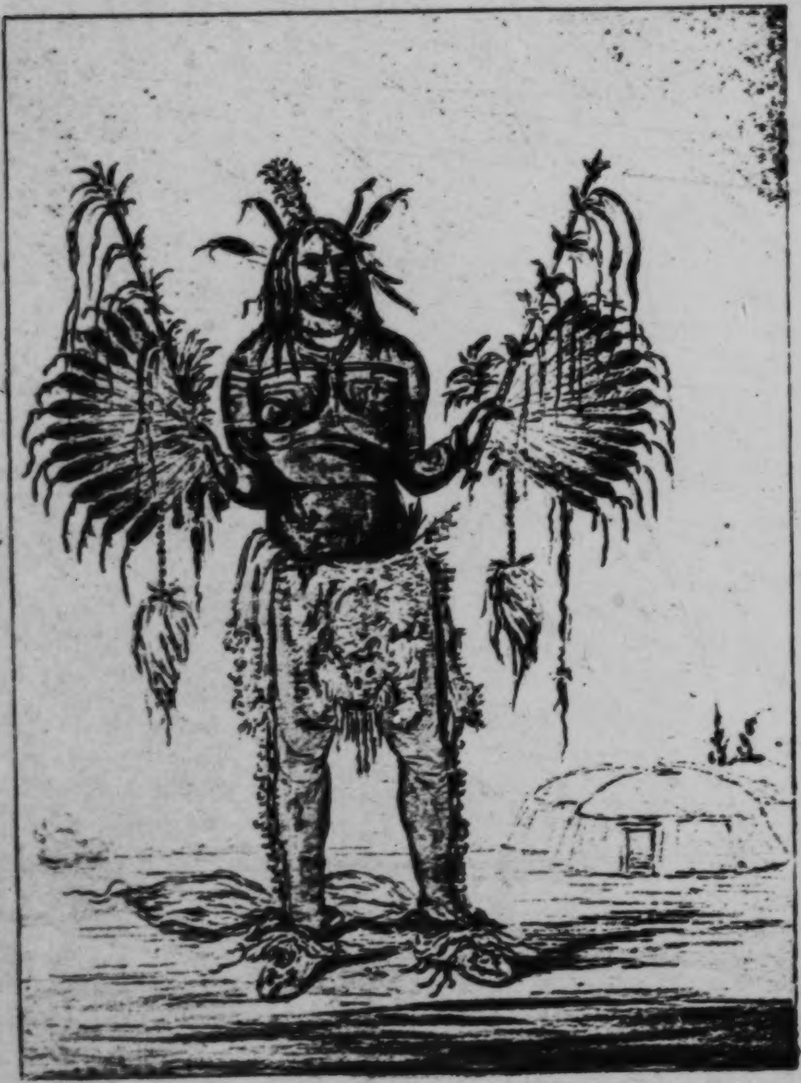
lette, and whistled away the time until twelve o'clock, before he made his appearance; having used the whole of the fore-part of the day at his toilette, arranging his dress and ornamenting his body for his picture.

At that hour then, bedaubed and streaked with paints of various colours, with bear's grease and charcoal, with medicine-pipes in his hands and foxes tails attached to his heels, entered Mah-to-he-hah (the old bear, PLATE 55), with a train of his own profession, who seated themselves around him; and also a number of boys, whom it was requested should remain with him, and whom I supposed it possible might have been pupils, whom he was instructing in the mysteries of *materia medica* and *hoca poca*. He took his position in the middle of the room, waving his eagle calumets in each hand, and singing his medicine-song which he sings over his dying patient, looking me full in the face until I completed his picture, which I painted at full length. His vanity has been completely gratified in the operation; he lies for hours together, day after day, in my room, in front of his picture, gazing intensely upon it; lights my pipe for me while I am painting—shakes hands with me a dozen times on each day, and talks of me, and enlarges upon my *medicine* virtues and my talents, wherever he goes; so that this new difficulty is now removed, and instead of preaching against me, he is one of my strongest and most enthusiastic friends and aids in the country.

There is yet to be described another sort of personage, that is often seen stalking about in all Indian communities, a kind of nondescript, with whom I have been somewhat annoyed, and still more amused, since I came to this village, of whom (or of *which*) I shall give some account in my next epistle.

7: Catlin R, E-5 (1832-1840) 1857
NQ17 Mandan NQ17

292



55

[facing p. 111]

LETTER—No. 16.

MANDAN VILLAGE, UPPER MISSOURI.

156 BESIDES chiefs, and braves and doctors, of whom I have heretofore spoken, there is yet another character of whom I must say a few words before I proceed to other topics. The person I allude to, is the one mentioned at the close of my last Letter, and familiarly known and countenanced in every tribe as an Indian *beau* or *dandy*. Such personages may be seen on every pleasant day, strutting and parading around the village in the most beautiful and unsoiled dresses, without the honourable trophies however of scalp locks and claws of the grizzly bear, attached to their costume, for with such things they deal not. They are not peculiarly anxious to hazard their lives in equal and honourable combat with the one, or disposed to cross the path of the other; but generally remain about the village, to take care of the women, and attire themselves in the skins of such animals as they can easily kill, without seeking the rugged cliffs for the war-eagle, or visiting the haunts of [301] the grizzly bear. They plume themselves with swan's-down and quills of ducks, with braids and plaits of sweet-scented grass and other harmless and unmeaning ornaments, which have no other merit than they themselves have, that of looking pretty and ornamental.

These clean and elegant gentlemen, who are very few in each tribe, are held in very little estimation by the chiefs and braves; inasmuch as it is known by all, that they have a most horrible aversion to arms, and are denominated "faint hearts" or "old women" by the whole tribe, and are therefore but little respected. They seem, however, to be tolerably well contented with the appellation, together with the celebrity they have acquired amongst the women and children for the beauty and elegance of their personal appearance; and most of them seem to take and enjoy their share of the world's pleasures, although they are looked upon as drones in society.

These gay and tinselled bucks may be seen in a pleasant day in all their plumes, astride of their pied or dappled ponies, with a fan in the right hand, made of a turkey's tail—with whip and a fly-brush attached to the wrist of the same hand, and underneath them a white and beautiful and soft pleasure-saddle, ornamented with porcupine quills and ermine, parading through and lounging about the village for an hour or so, when they will cautiously bend their course to the suburbs of the town, where they will sit

or recline upon their horses for an hour or two, overlooking the beautiful 156
games where the braves and the young aspirants are contending in manly
and athletic amusements;—when they are fatigued with this severe effort,
they wend their way back again, lift off their fine white saddle of doe's-skin,
which is wadded with buffalo's hair, turn out their pony—take a little refreshment,
smoke a pipe, fan themselves to sleep, and doze away the rest
of the day.

Whilst I have been painting, from day to day, there have been two or 123
three of these fops continually strutting and taking their attitudes in front of
my door; decked out in all their finery, without receiving other benefit or 156
other information, than such as they could discover through the cracks and
seams of my cabin. The chiefs, I observed, passed them by without notice,
and of course, without inviting them in; and they seemed to figure about my
door from day to day in their best dresses and best attitudes, as if in hopes
that I would select them as models, for my canvass. It was natural that
I should do so, for their costume and personal appearance was entirely more
beautiful than anything else to be seen in the village. My plans were laid,
and one day when I had got through with all of the head men, who were
willing to sit to be painted, and there were two or three of the chiefs lounging
in my room, I stepped to the door and tapped one of these fellows on
the shoulder, who took the hint, and stepped in, well-pleased and delighted
with the signal and honourable notice I had at length taken of him and
his beautiful dress. Readers, you cannot imagine what was the expression
of gratitude which beamed forth in this poor fellow's face, and how high
his heart beat with joy and pride at the idea of my selecting him to be
immortal, alongside of the chiefs and worthies whose portraits he saw
arranged around the room; and by which honour he, undoubtedly, considered
himself well paid for two or three weeks of regular painting, and
greasing, and dressing, and standing alternately on one leg and the other
at the door of my premises.

Well, I placed him before me, and a canvass on my easel, and "chalked
him out" at full length. He was truly a beautiful subject for the brush,
and I was filled with enthusiasm—his dress from head to foot was of the
skins of the mountain-goat, and dressed so neatly, that they were almost as [292]
soft and as white as Canton crape—around the bottom and the sides it was
trimmed with ermine, and porcupine quills of beautiful dyes garnished it
in a hundred parts;—his hair which was long, and spread over his back and
shoulders, extending nearly to the ground, was all combed back and parted
on his forehead like that of a woman. He was a tall and fine figure, with
ease and grace in his movements, that were well worthy of a man of better
caste. In his left hand he held a beautiful pipe—and in his right hand he
plied his fan, and on his wrist was still attached his whip of elk's horn, and
his fly-brush, made of the buffalo's tail. There was nought about him of
the terrible, and nought to shock the finest, chastest intellect.

123 156 I had thus far progressed, with high-wrought feelings of pleasure, when the two or three chiefs, who had been seated around the lodge, and whose portraits I had before painted, arose suddenly, and wrapping themselves tightly in their robes, crossed my room with a quick and heavy step, and took an informal leave of my cabin. I was apprehensive of their displeasure, though I continued my work; and in a few moments the interpreter came furiously into my room, addressing me thus:—"My God, Sir! this never will do; you have given great offence to the chiefs—they have made complaint of your conduct to me—they tell me this is a worthless fellow—a man of no account in the nation, and if you paint his picture, you must instantly destroy theirs; you have no alternative, my dear Sir—and the quicker this chap is out of your lodge the better."

The same matter was explained to my sitter by the interpreter, when he picked up his robe, wrapped himself in it, plied his fan nimbly about his face, and walked out of the lodge in silence, but with quite a consequential smile, taking his old position in front of the door for awhile, after which he drew himself quietly off without further exhibition. So highly do Mandan braves and worthies value the honour of being painted; and so little do they value a man, however lavishly Nature may have bestowed her master touches upon him, who has not the pride and noble bearing of a warrior.

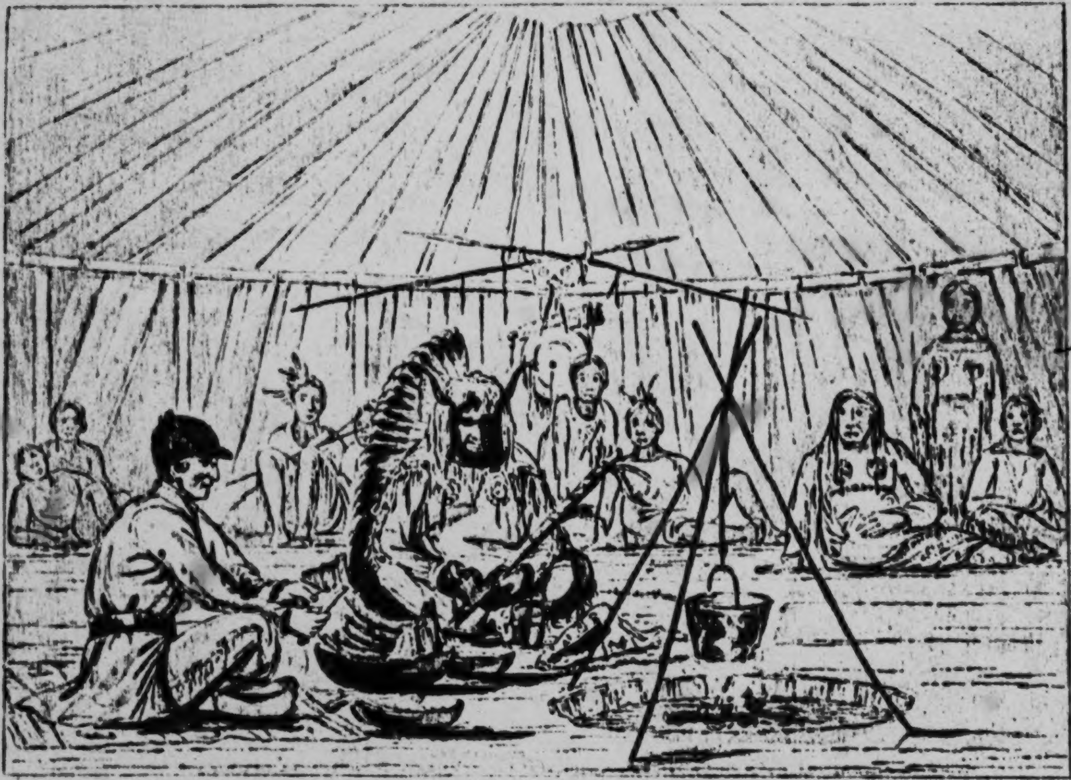
000 I spoke in a former Letter of Mah-to-toh-pa (the four bears), the second chief of the nation, and the most popular man of the Mandans—a high-minded and gallant warrior, as well as a polite and polished gentleman. Since I painted his portrait, as I before described, I have received at his hands many marked and signal attentions; some of which I must name to you, as the very relation of them will put you in possession of many little forms and modes of Indian life, that otherwise might not have been noted.

574 About a week since, this noble fellow stepped into my painting-room about twelve o'clock in the day, in full and splendid dress, and passing his arm through mine, pointed the way, and led me in the most gentlemanly manner, through the village and into his own lodge, where a feast was prepared in a careful manner and waiting our arrival. [342] The lodge in which he dwelt was a room of immense size, some forty or fifty feet in diameter, in a circular form, and about twenty feet high—with a sunken curb of stone in the centre, of five or six feet in diameter and one foot deep, which contained the fire over which the pot was boiling. I was led near the edge of this curb, and seated on a very handsome robe, most ingeniously garnished and painted with hieroglyphics; and he seated himself gracefully on another one at a little distance from me; with the feast prepared in several dishes, resting on a beautiful rush mat, which was placed between us (PLATE 62).

262 264 415 The simple feast which was spread before us consisted of three dishes only, two of which were served in wooden bowls, and the third in an earthen vessel of their own manufacture, somewhat in shape of a bread-tray in our own country. This last contained a quantity of *pem-i-can* and *marrow-*

7: Catlin R, F (1832-1840) 1857
NQ17 Mandan NQ17

574
264



[facing p.114]

262 *fat;* and one of the former held a fine brace of buffalo ribs, delightfully
roasted; and the other was filled with a kind of paste or pudding, made of
264 the flour of the "*pomme blanche,*" as the French call it, a delicious turnip
415 of the prairie, finely flavoured with the buffalo berries, which are collected in great quantities in this country, and used with divers dishes in cooking, as we in civilised countries use dried currants, which they very much resemble.

276 A handsome pipe and a tobacco-pouch made of the otter skin, filled with
k'nick-k'neck (Indian tobacco), laid by the side of the feast; and when we
264 were seated, mine host took up his pipe, and deliberately filled it; and instead of lighting it by the fire, which he could easily have done, he drew from his pouch his flint and steel, and raised a spark with which he kindled it. He drew a few strong whiffs through it, and presented the stem of it to my mouth, through which I drew a whiff or two while he held the stem in his hands. This done, he laid down the pipe, and drawing his knife from his belt, cut off a very small piece of the meat from the ribs, and pronouncing the words "Ho-pe-ne-chee wa-pa-shee" (meaning a *medicine* sacrifice), threw it into the fire.

He then (by signals) requested me to eat, and I commenced, after drawing out from my belt my knife (which it is supposed that every man in this country carries about him, for at an Indian feast a knife is never offered
[576] to a guest). Reader, be not astonished that I sat and ate my dinner *alone,*
for such is the custom of this strange land. In all tribes in these western regions it is an invariable rule that a chief never eats with his guests invited to a feast; but while they eat, he sits by, at their service, and ready to wait upon them; deliberately charging and lighting the pipe which is to be passed around after the feast is over. Such was the case in the present instance, and while I was eating, Mah-to-toh-pa sat cross-legged before me, cleaning his pipe and preparing it for a cheerful smoke when I had finished my meal. For this ceremony I observed he was making unusual preparation, and I observed as I ate, that after he had taken enough of the k'nick-k'neck or bark of the red willow, from his pouch, he rolled out of it also a piece of the "*castor,*" which it is customary amongst these folks to carry in their tobacco-sack to give it a flavour; and, shaving off a small quantity of it, mixed it with the bark, with which he charged his pipe. This done, he drew also from his sack a small parcel containing a fine powder, which was made of dried buffalo dung, a little of which he spread over the top, (according also to custom,) which was like tinder, having no other effect than that of lighting the pipe with ease and satisfaction. My appetite satiated, I straightened up, and with a whiff the pipe was lit, and we enjoyed together for a quarter of an hour the most delightful exchange of good feelings, amid clouds of smoke and pantomimic signs and gesticulations.

251 The dish of "pemican and marrow-fat," of which I spoke, was thus:—The
first, an article of food used throughout this country, as familiarly as we use

251 bread in the civilized world. It is made of buffalo meat dried very hard, and afterwards pounded in a large wooden mortar until it is made nearly as fine as sawdust, then packed in this dry state in bladders or sacks of skin, and is easily carried to any part of the world in good order. "Marrow-fat" is collected by the Indians from the buffalo bones which they break to pieces, yielding a prodigious quantity of marrow, which is boiled out and put into buffalo bladders which have been distended; and after it cools, becomes quite hard like tallow, and has the appearance, and very nearly the flavour, of the richest yellow butter. At a feast, chunks of this marrow-fat are cut off and placed in a tray or bowl, with the pemican, and eaten together; which we civilized folks in these regions consider a very good substitute for (and indeed we generally so denominate it) "bread and
415 butter." In this dish laid a spoon made of the buffalo's horn, which was black as jet, and beautifully polished; in one of the others there was another of still more ingenious and beautiful workmanship, made of the horn of the mountain-sheep, or "Gros corn," as the French trappers call them; it was large enough to hold of itself two or three pints, and was almost entirely transparent.

I spoke also of the earthen dishes or bowls in which these viands were served out; they are a familiar part of the culinary furniture of every Mandan lodge, and are manufactured by the women of this tribe in great quantities, and modelled into a thousand forms and tastes. They are made by the hands of the women, from a tough black clay, and baked in kilns which are made for the purpose, and are nearly equal in hardness to our own manufacture of pottery; though they have not yet got the art of glazing, which would be to them a most valuable secret. They make them so strong and serviceable, however, that they hang them over the fire as we do our iron pots, and boil their meat in them with perfect success. I have seen some few specimens of such manufacture, which have been dug up in Indian mounds and tombs in the southern and middle states, placed in our Eastern Museums and looked upon as a great wonder, when here this novelty is at once done away with, and the whole mystery; where women can be seen handling and using them by hundreds, and they can be seen every day in the summer also, moulding them into many fanciful forms, and passing them through the kiln where they are hardened.

576 Whilst sitting at this feast the wigwam was as silent as death, although we were not alone in it. This chief, like most others, had a plurality of wives,
595 and all of them (some six or seven) were seated around the sides of the lodge, upon robes or mats placed upon the ground, and not allowed to speak, though they were it readiness to obey his orders or commands, which were uniformly given by signs manual, and executed in the neatest and most silent manner.

431 When I arose to return, the pipe through which we had smoked was presented to me; and the robe on which I had sat, he gracefully raised by the corners and tendered it to me, explaining by signs that the paintings

which were on it were the representations of the battles of his life, where he had fought and killed with his own hand fourteen of his enemies; that he had been two weeks engaged in painting it for me, and that he had invited me here on this occasion to present it to me. The robe, readers, which I shall describe in a future epistle, I took upon my shoulder, and he took me by the arm and led me back to my painting-room. 431

LETTER—No. 17.

MANDAN VILLAGE, *UPPER MISSOURI.*

595 171 I MENTIONED in the foregoing epistle, that the chiefs of the Mandans frequently have a plurality of wives. Such is the custom amongst all of these North Western tribes, and a few general remarks on this subject will apply to them all, and save the trouble of repeating them.

Polygamy is countenanced amongst all of the North American Indians, so far as I have visited them; and it is no uncommon thing to find a chief with six, eight, or ten, and some with twelve or fourteen wives in his lodge. Such is an ancient custom, and in their estimation is right as well as necessary. 562 595 Women in a savage state, I believe, are always held in a rank inferior to that of the men, in relation to whom in many respects they stand rather in the light of menials and slaves than otherwise; and as they are the "hewers of wood and drawers of water," it becomes a matter of necessity for a chief (who must be liberal, keep open doors, and entertain, for the support of his popularity) to have in his wigwam a sufficient number of such handmaids or menials to perform the numerous duties and drudgeries of so large and expensive an establishment.

595 556 462 There are two other reasons for this custom which operate with equal, if not with greater force than the one above assigned. In the first place, these people, though far behind the civilized world in acquisitiveness, have still more or less passion for the accumulation of wealth, or, in other words, for the luxuries of life; and a chief, excited by a desire of this kind, together with a wish to be able to furnish his lodge with something more than ordinary for the entertainment of his own people, as well as strangers who fall upon his hospitality, sees fit to marry a number of wives, who are kept at hard labour during most of the year; and the avails of that labour enable him to procure those luxuries, and give to his lodge the appearance of respectability which is not ordinarily seen. Amongst those tribes who trade with the Fur Companies, this system is carried out to a great extent, and the women are kept for the greater part of the year, dressing buffalo robes and other skins for the market; and the brave or chief, who has the greatest number of wives, is considered the most affluent and envied man in the tribe; for his table is most bountifully supplied, and his lodge the most abundantly furnished with the luxuries

of civilized manufacture, who has at the year's end the greatest number 595
of robes to vend to the Fur Company.

The manual labour amongst savages is all done by the women; and as 556
there are no daily labourers or persons who will "*hire out*" to labour for 462
another, it becomes necessary for him who requires more than the labour or services of one, to add to the number by legalizing and compromising by the ceremony of marriage, his stock of labourers; who can thus, and thus alone, be easily enslaved, and the results of their labour turned to good account.

There is yet the other inducement, which probably is more effective than 595
either; the natural inclination which belongs to man, who stands high in the estimation of his people and wields the sceptre of power—surrounded by temptations which he considers it would be unnatural to resist, where no law or regulation of society stands in the way of his enjoyment. Such a custom amongst savage nations can easily be excused too, and we are bound to excuse it, when we behold man in a state of nature, as he was made, following a natural inclination, which is sanctioned by ancient custom and by their religion, without a law or regulation of their society to discountenance it; and when, at the same time, such an accumulation of a man's household, instead of quadrupling his expenses (as would be the case in the civilized world), actually becomes his wealth, as the results of their labour abundantly secure to him all the necessaries and luxuries of life.

There are other and very rational grounds on which the propriety of such a custom may be urged, one of which is as follows:—as all nations of Indians in their natural condition are unceasingly at war with the tribes that are about them, for the adjustment of ancient and never-ending feuds, as well as from a love of glory, to which in Indian life the battle-field is almost the only road, their warriors are killed off to that extent, that in many instances two and sometimes three women to a man are found in a tribe. In such instances I have found that the custom of polygamy has kindly helped the community to an evident relief from a cruel and prodigious calamity.

The instances of which I have above spoken, are generally confined to the chiefs and medicine-men; though there is no regulation prohibiting a poor or obscure individual from marrying several wives, other than the personal difficulties which lie between him and the hand which he wishes in vain to get, for want of sufficient celebrity in society, or from a still more frequent objection, that of his inability (from want of worldly goods) to deal in the customary way with the fathers of the girls whom he would appropriate to his own household.

There are very few instances indeed, to be seen in these regions, where a poor or ordinary citizen has more than one wife; but amongst chiefs and braves of great reputation, and doctors, it is common to see some six or

7: Catlin R, E-5 (1832-1840) 1857

NQ17 Mandan NQ17

595 eight living under one roof, and all apparently quiet and contented; seemingly harmonizing, and enjoying the modes of life and treatment that falls to their lot.

583 Wives in this country are mostly treated for with the father, as in all instances they are regularly bought and sold. In many cases the bargain is made with the father alone, without ever consulting the inclinations of the girl, and seems to be conducted on his part as a mercenary contract entirely, where he stands out for the highest price he can possibly command for her. There are other instances to be sure, where the parties approach each other, and from the expression of a mutual fondness, make their own arrangements, and pass their own mutual vows, which are quite as sacred and inviolable as similar assurances when made in the civilized world. Yet even in such cases, the marriage is never consummated without the necessary form of making presents to the father of the girl.

177 It becomes a matter of policy and almost of absolute necessity, for the white men who are Traders in these regions to connect themselves in this way, to one or more of the most influential families in the tribe, which in a measure identifies their interest with that of the nation, and enables them, with the influence of their new family connexions, to carry on successfully their business transactions with them. The young women of the best families only can aspire to such an elevation; and the most of them are exceedingly ambitious for such a connexion, inasmuch as they are certain of a delightful exemption from the slavish duties that devolve upon them when married under other circumstances; and expect to be, as they generally are, allowed to lead a life of ease and idleness, covered with mantles of blue and scarlet cloth—with beads and trinkets, and ribbons, in which they flounce and flirt about, the envied and tinselled belles of every tribe.

These connexions, however, can scarcely be called marriages, for I believe they are generally entered into without the form or solemnizing ceremony of a marriage, and on the part of the father of the girls, conducted purely as a mercenary or business transaction; in which they are very expert, and practice a deal of shrewdness in exacting an adequate price from a purchaser whom they consider possessed of so large and so rich a stock of the world's goods; and who they deem abundantly able to pay liberally for so delightful a commodity.

Almost every Trader and every clerk who commences in the business of this country, speedily enters into such an arrangement, which is done with as little ceremony as he would bargain for a horse, and just as unceremoniously do they annul and abolish this connexion when they wish to leave the country, or change their positions from one tribe to another; at which time the woman is left, a fair and proper candidate for matrimony or speculation, when another applicant comes along, and her father equally desirous for another horse or gun, &c. which he can easily command at her second espousal.

From the enslaved and degraded condition in which the women are held 593
in the Indian country, the world would naturally think that theirs must be a
community formed of incongruous and unharmonizing materials; and consequently
destitute of the fine, reciprocal feelings and attachments which
flow from the domestic relations in the civilized world; yet it would be
untrue, and doing injustice to the Indians, to say that they were in the least
behind us in conjugal, in filial, and in paternal affection. There is no trait
in the human character which is more universal than the attachments which
flow from these relations, and there is no part of the human species who
have a stronger affection and a higher regard for them than the North
American Indians.

There is no subject in the Indian character of more importance to be 000
rightly understood than this, and none either that has furnished me more
numerous instances and more striking proofs, of which I shall make use on a
future occasion, when I shall say a vast deal more of marriage—of divorce
—of polygamy—and of Indian domestic relations. For the present I am
scribbling about the looks and usages of the Indians who are about me
and under my eye; and I must not digress too much into general remarks,
lest I lose sight of those who are near me, and the first to be heralded.

Such, then, are the Mandans—their women are beautiful and modest,— 583
and amongst the respectable families, virtue is as highly cherished and as inapproachable,
as in any society whatever; yet at the same time a chief may
marry a dozen wives if he pleases, and so may a white man; and if either
wishes to marry the most beautiful and modest girl in the tribe, she is valued
only equal, perhaps, to two horses, a gun with powder and ball for a year, five
or six pounds of beads, a couple of gallons of whiskey, and a handful of awls.

The girls of this tribe, like those of most of these north-western tribes, 582
marry at the age of twelve or fourteen, and some at the age of eleven
years; and their beauty, from this fact, as well as from the slavish life they
lead, soon after marriage vanishes. Their occupations are almost continual,
and they seem to go industriously at them, as if from choice or inclination,
without a murmur.

The principal occupations of the women in this village, consist in procuring 462
wood and water, in cooking, dressing robes and other skins, in drying 241
meat and wild fruit, and raising corn (maize). The Mandans are somewhat
of agriculturists, as they raise a great deal of corn and some pumpkins and
squashes. This is all done by the women, who make their hoes of the
shoulder-blade of the buffalo or the elk, and dig the ground over instead of
ploughing it, which is consequently done with a vast deal of labour. They
raise a very small sort of corn, the ears of which are not longer than a man's
thumb. This variety is well adapted to their climate, as it ripens sooner
than other varieties, which would not mature in so cold a latitude. The
green corn season is one of great festivity with them, and one of much
importance. The greater part of their crop is eaten during these festivals, 251

251 and the remainder is gathered and dried on the cob, before it has ripened,
and packed away in "*caches*" (as the French call them), holes dug in the
ground, some six or seven feet deep, the insides of which are somewhat in
the form of a jug, and tightly closed at the top. The corn, and even dried
meat and pemican, are placed in these *caches*, being packed tight around
the sides, with prairie grass, and effectually preserved through the severest
winters.

Corn and dried meat are generally laid in in the fall, in sufficient quantities
251 to support them through the winter. These are the principal articles of food
262 during that long and inclement season; and in addition to them, they oftentimes
have in store great quantities of dried squashes and dried "*pommes
blanches*," a kind of turnip which grows in great abundance in these
regions, and of which I have before spoken. These are dried in great
quantities, and pounded into a sort of meal, and cooked with the dried
meat and corn. Great quantities also of wild fruit of different kinds are
dried and laid away in store for the winter season, such as buffalo berries,
service berries, strawberries, and wild plums.

The buffalo meat, however, is the great staple and "staff of life" in this
252 country, and seldom (if ever) fails to afford them an abundant and wholesome
262 means of subsistence. There are, from a fair computation, something
like 250,000 Indians in these western regions, who live almost exclusively
on the flesh of these animals, through every part of the year. During the
summer and fall months they use the meat fresh, and cook it in a great
variety of ways, by roasting, broiling, boiling, stewing, smoking, &c.; and
by boiling the ribs and joints with the marrow in them, make a delicious
soup, which is universally used, and in vast quantities. The Mandans, I
264 find, have no regular or stated times for their meals, but generally eat about
twice in the twenty-four hours. The pot is always boiling over the fire, and
any one who is hungry (either of the household or from any other part of the
village) has a right to order it taken off, and to fall to eating as he pleases.
Such is an unvarying custom amongst the North American Indians, and I
very much doubt, whether the civilized world have in their institutions any
system which can properly be called more humane and charitable. Every
574 man, woman, or child in Indian communities is allowed to enter any one's
lodge, and even that of the chief of the nation, and eat when they are
hungry, provided misfortune or necessity has driven them to it. Even
so can the poorest and most worthless drone of the nation; if he is too lazy
to hunt or to supply himself, he can walk into any lodge and everyone will
share with him as long as there is anything to eat. He, however, who thus
begs when he is able to hunt, pays dear for his meat, for he is stigmatized
with the disgraceful epithet of a poltroon and a beggar.

264 The Mandans, like all other tribes, sit at their meals cross-legged, or rather
516 with their ancles crossed in front of them, and both feet drawn close under
their bodies; or, which is very often the case also, take their meals in a re-

clining posture, with the legs thrown out, and the body resting on one 264
elbow and fore-arm, which are under them. The dishes from which they eat 516
are invariably on the ground or floor of the lodge, and the group resting on
buffalo robes or mats of various structure and manufacture.

The position in which the women sit at their meals and on other occasions is different from that of the men, and one which they take and rise from again, with great ease and much grace, by merely bending the knees both together, inclining the body back and the head and shoulders quite forward, they squat entirely down to the ground, inclining both feet either to the right or the left. In this position they always rest while eating, and it is both modest and graceful, for they seem, with apparent ease, to assume the position and rise out of it, without using their hands in any way to assist them.

These women, however, although graceful and civil, and ever so beautiful 562
or ever so hungry, are not allowed to sit in the same group with the men 264
while at their meals. So far as I have yet travelled in the Indian country, I
never have seen an Indian woman eating with her husband. Men form the
first group at the banquet, and women, and children and dogs all come to-
gether at the next, and these gormandize and glut themselves to an enormous
extent, though the men very seldom do.

It is time that an error on this subject, which has gone generally abroad 261
in the world, was corrected. It is everywhere asserted, and almost univer-
sally believed, that the Indians are "enormous eaters;" but comparatively
speaking, I assure my readers that this is an error. I venture to say that
there are no persons on earth who practice greater prudence and self-denial,
than the men do (amongst the wild Indians), who are constantly in war and
in the chase, or in their athletic sports and exercises; for all of which they
are excited by the highest ideas of pride and honour, and every kind of
excess is studiously avoided; and for a very great part of their lives, the
most painful abstinence is enforced upon themselves, for the purpose of
preparing their bodies and their limbs for these extravagant exertions.
Many a man who has been a few weeks along the frontier, amongst the 177
drunken, naked and beggared part of the Indian race, and run home
and written a book on Indians, has, no doubt, often seen them eat to
beastly excess; and he has seen them also guzzle whiskey (and perhaps *sold*
it to them) till he has seen them glutted and besotted, without will or
energy to move; and many and thousands of such things can always be
seen, where white people have made beggars of them, and they have nothing
to do but lie under a fence and beg a whole week to get meat and whiskey
enough for one feast and one carouse; but amongst the wild Indians in this
country there are no beggars—no drunkards—and every man, from a beau-
tiful natural precept, studies to keep his body and mind in such a healthy
shape and condition as will at all times enable him to use his weapons in
self-defence, or struggle for the prize in their manly games.

261 As I before observed, these men generally eat but twice a day, and many times not more than once, and those meals are light and simple compared with the meals that are swallowed in the civilized world; and by the very people also, who sit at the festive board three times a day, making a jest of the Indian for his eating, when they actually guzzle more liquids, besides their eating, than would fill the stomach of an Indian.

There are, however, many seasons and occasions in the year with all Indians, when they fast for several days in succession; and others where they can *get* nothing to eat; and at such times (their habits are such) they may be seen to commence with an enormous meal, and because they do so, it is an insufficient reason why we should for ever remain under so egregious an error with regard to a single custom of these people.

I have seen so many of these, and lived with them, and travelled with them, and oftentimes felt as if I should starve to death on an equal allowance, that I am fully convinced I am correct in saying that the North American Indians, taking them in the aggregate, even where they have an abundance to subsist on, eat less than any civilized population of equal numbers, that I have ever travelled amongst.

251
171 Their mode of curing and preserving the buffalo meat is somewhat curious, and in fact it is almost incredible also; for it is all cured or dried in the sun, without the aid of salt or smoke! The method of doing this is the same amongst all the tribes, from this to the Mexican Provinces, and is as follows:—The choicest parts of the flesh from the buffalo are cut out by the squaws, and carried home on their backs or on horses, and there cut "*across the grain,*" in such a manner as will take alternately the layers of lean and fat; and having prepared it all in this way, in strips about half an inch in thickness, it is hung up by hundreds and thousands of pounds on poles resting on crotches, out of the reach of dogs or wolves, and exposed to the rays of the sun for several days, when it becomes so effectually dried, that it can be carried to any part of the world without damage. This seems almost an unaccountable thing, and the more so, as it is done in the hottest months of the year, and also in all the different latitudes of an Indian country.

So singular a fact as this can only be accounted for, I consider, on the ground of the extraordinary rarity and purity of the air which we meet with in these vast tracts of country, which are now properly denominated "the great buffalo plains," a series of exceedingly elevated plateaus of *steppes* or *prairies*, lying at and near the base of the Rocky Mountains.

263 It is a fact then, which I presume will be new to most of the world, that meat can be cured in the sun without the aid of smoke or salt; and it is a fact equally true and equally surprising also, that none of these tribes use salt in any way, although their country abounds in salt springs; and in many places, in the frequent walks of the Indian, the prairie may be seen, for miles together, covered with an incrustation of salt as white as the drifted snow.

I have, in travelling with Indians, encamped by such places, where they 262 have cooked and eaten their meat, when I have been unable to prevail on 263 them to use salt in any quantity whatever. The Indians cook their meat more than the civilized people do, and I have long since learned, from necessity, that meat thus cooked can easily be eaten and relished too, without salt or other condiment.

The fact above asserted applies exclusively to those tribes of Indians which I have found in their primitive state, living entirely on meat; but everywhere along our Frontier, where the game of the country has long since been chiefly destroyed, and these people have become semi-civilized, raising and eating, as we do, a variety of vegetable food, they use (and no doubt require), a great deal of salt; and in many instances use it even to destruc-
ve excess.

LETTER—No. 18.

MANDAN VILLAGE, UPPER MISSOURI.

461 535 The Mandans, like all other tribes, lead lives of idleness and leisure; and of course, devote a great deal of time to their sports and amusements, of which they have a great variety. Of these, dancing is one of the principal, and may be seen in a variety of forms: such as the buffalo dance, the boasting dance, the begging dance, the scalp dance, and a dozen other kinds of dances, all of which have their peculiar characters and meanings or objects.

535 533 198 These exercises are exceedingly grotesque in their appearance, and to the eye of a traveller who knows not their meaning or importance, they are an uncouth and frightful display of starts, and jumps, and yelps, and jarring gutturals, which are sometimes truly terrifying. But when one gives them a little attention, and has been lucky enough to be initiated into their mysterious meaning, they become a subject of the most intense and exciting interest. Every dance has its peculiar step, and every step has its meaning; every dance also has its peculiar song, and that is so intricate and mysterious oftentimes, that not one in ten of the young men who are dancing and singing it, know the meaning of the song which they are chanting over. None but the medicine-men are allowed to understand them; and even they are generally only initiated into these secret arcana, on the payment of a liberal stipend for their tuition, which requires much application and study. There is evidently a set song and sentiment for every dance, for the songs are perfectly measured, and sung in exact time with the beat of the drum; and always with an uniform and invariable set of sounds and expressions, which clearly indicate certain sentiments, which are expressed by the voice, though sometimes not given in any known language whatever.

They have other dances and songs which are not so mystified, but which are sung and understood by every person in the tribe, being sung in their own language, with much poetry in them, and perfectly metred, but without rhyme. On these subjects I shall take another occasion to say more; and will for the present turn your attention to the style and modes in which some of these curious transactions are conducted.

535 My ears have been almost continually ringing since I came here, with the din of yelping and beating of the drums; but I have for several days

past been peculiarly engrossed, and my senses almost confounded with the stamping, and grunting, and bellowing of the *buffalo dance*, which closed a few days since at sunrise (thank Heaven), and which I must needs describe to you. 535

Buffaloes, it is known, are a sort of roaming creatures, congregating occasionally in huge masses, and strolling away about the country from east to west, or from north to south, or just where their whims or strange fancies may lead them; and the Mandans are sometimes, by this means, most unceremoniously left without any thing to eat; and being a small tribe, and unwilling to risk their lives by going far from home in the face of their more powerful enemies, are oftentimes left almost in a state of starvation. In any emergency of this kind, every man musters and brings out of his lodge his mask (the skin of a buffalo's head with the horns on), which he is obliged to keep in readiness for this occasion; and then commences the buffalo dance, of which I have above spoken, which is held for the purpose of making "buffalo come" (as they term it), of inducing the buffalo herds to change the direction of their wanderings, and bend their course towards the Mandan village, and graze about on the beautiful hills and bluffs in its vicinity, where the Mandans can shoot them down and cook them as they want them for food.

For the most part of the year, the young warriors and hunters, by riding out a mile or two from the village, can kill meat in abundance; and sometimes large herds of these animals may be seen grazing in full view of the village. There are other seasons also when the young men have ranged about the country as far as they are willing to risk their lives, on account of their enemies, without finding meat. This sad intelligence is brought back to the chiefs and doctors, who sit in solemn council, and consult on the most expedient measures to be taken, until they are sure to decide upon the old and only expedient which "never has failed." 535 224

The chief issues his order to his runners or criers, who proclaim it through the village—and in a few minutes the dance begins. The place where this strange operation is carried on is in the public area in the centre of the village, and in front of the great medicine or mystery lodge. About ten or fifteen Mandans at a time join in the dance, each one with the skin of the buffalo's head (or mask) with the horns on, placed over his head, and in his hand his favourite bow or lance, with which he is used to slay the buffalo. 535

I mentioned that this dance always had the desired effect, that it never fails, nor can it, for it cannot be stopped (but is going incessantly day and night) until "buffalo come." Drums are beating and rattles are shaken, and songs and yells incessantly are shouted, and lookers-on stand ready with masks on their heads, and weapons in hand, to take the place of each one as he becomes fatigued, and jumps out of the ring.

During this time of general excitement, spies or "*lookers*" are kept on the

535 hills in the neighbourhood of the village, who, when they discover buffaloes in sight, give the appropriate signal, by "throwing their robes," which is instantly seen in the village, and understood by the whole tribe. At this joyful intelligence there is a shout of thanks to the Great Spirit, and more especially to the mystery-man, and the dancers, who *have been the immediate cause of their success!* There is then a brisk preparation for the chase—a grand hunt takes place. The choicest pieces of the victims are sacrificed to the Great Spirit, and then a surfeit and a carouse.

These dances have sometimes been continued in this village two and three weeks without stopping an instant, until the joyful moment when buffaloes made their appearance. So they *never fail*; and they think they have been the means of bringing them in.

Every man in the Mandan village (as I have before said) is obliged by a village regulation, to keep the mask of the buffalo, hanging on a post at the head of his bed, which he can use on his head whenever he is called upon by the chiefs, to dance for the coming of buffaloes. The mask is put over the head, and generally has a strip of the skin hanging to it, of the whole length of the animal, with the tail attached to it, which, passing down over the back of the dancer, is dragging on the ground (PLATE 56). When one becomes fatigued of the exercise, he signifies it by bending quite forward, and sinking his body towards the ground; when another draws a bow upon him and hits him with a blunt arrow, and he falls like a buffalo—is seized by the bye-standers, who drag him out of the ring by the heels, brandishing their knives about him; and having gone through the motions of skinning and cutting him up, they let him off, and his place is at once supplied by another, who dances into the ring with his mask on; and by this taking of places, the scene is easily kept up night and day, until the desired effect has been produced, that of "making buffalo come."

The day before yesterday however, readers, which, though it commenced in joy and thanksgiving to the Great Spirit for the signal success which had attended their several days of dancing and supplication, ended in a calamity which threw the village of the Mandans into mourning and repentant tears, and that at a time of scarcity and great distress. The signal was given into the village on that morning from the top of a distant bluff, that a band of buffaloes were in sight, though at a considerable distance off, and every heart beat with joy, and every eye watered and glistened with gladness.

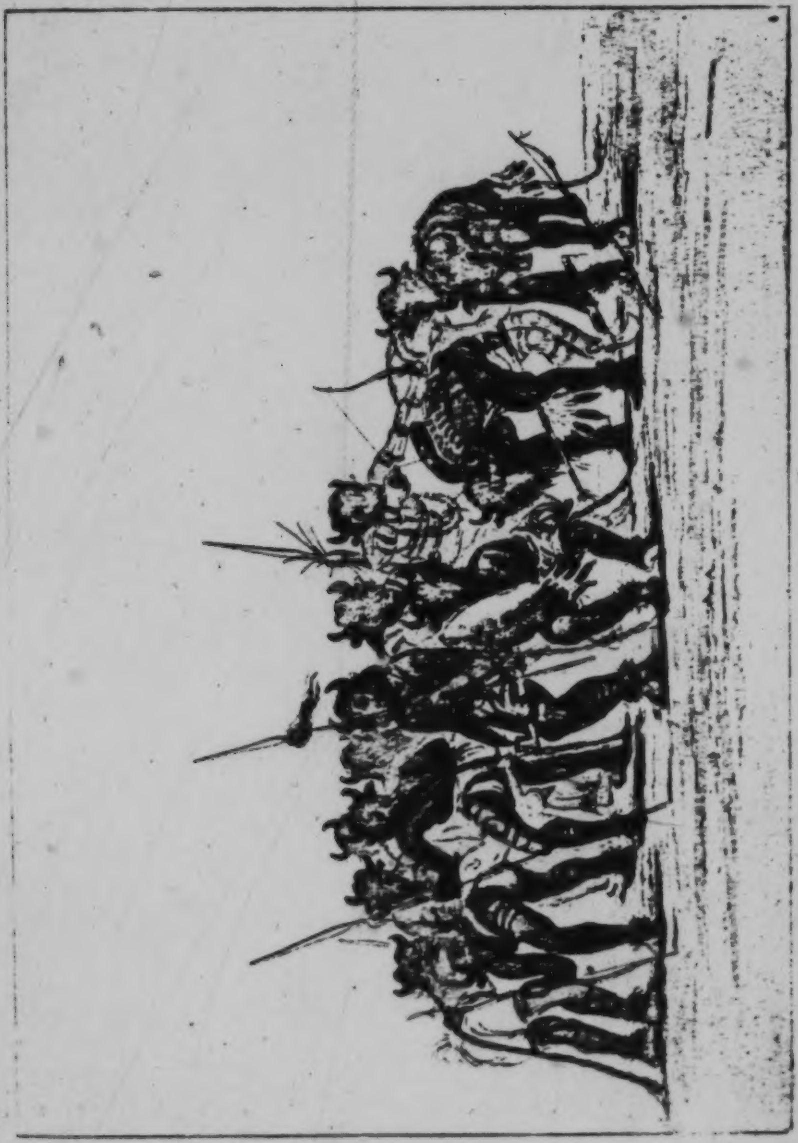
224 The dance had lasted some three or four days, and now, instead of the doleful tap of the drum and the begging chaunts of the dancers, the stamping of horses was heard as they were led and galloped through the village,—young men were throwing off their robes and their shirts,—were seen snatching a handful of arrows from their quivers, and stringing their sinewy bows, glancing their eyes and their smiles at their sweethearts, and mounting their ponies. * * *

* * A few minutes there had been of bustle and

7: Catlin R, E-5 (1832-1840) 1857

NQ17 Mandan NQ17

535



[facing p. 128]

224 boasting, whilst bows were twanging and spears were polishing by running their blades into the ground—every face and every eye was filled with joy and gladness—horses were pawing and snuffing in fury for the outset, when Louison Frénié, an interpreter of the Fur Company, galloped through the village with his rifle in his hand and his powder-horn at his side; his head and waist were bandaged with handkerchiefs, and his shirt sleeves rolled up to his shoulders—the hunter's yell issued from his lips and was repeated through the village; he flew to the bluffs, and behind him and over the graceful swells of the prairie, galloped the emulous youths, whose hearts were beating high and quick for the onset.

261 In the village, where hunger had reigned, and starvation was almost ready to look them in the face, all was instantly turned to joy and gladness. The chiefs and doctors who had been for some days dealing out minimum rations to the community from the public crib, now spread before their subjects the contents of their own private *caches*, and the last of every thing that could be mustered, that they might eat a thanksgiving to the Great Spirit for his goodness in sending them a supply of buffalo meat. A general carouse of banqueting ensued, which occupied the greater part of the day; and their hidden stores which might have fed an emergency for several weeks, were pretty nearly used up on the occasion—bones were half picked, and dishes half emptied and then handed to the dogs. *I* was not forgotten neither, in the general surfeit; several large and generous wooden bowls of pemican and other palatable food were sent to my painting-room, and I received them in this time of scarcity with great pleasure.

721 After this general indulgence was over, and the dogs had licked the dishes, their usual games and amusements ensued—and hilarity and mirth, and joy took possession of, and reigned in, every nook and corner of the village; and in the midst of this, screams and shrieks were heard! and echoed everywhere. Women and children scrambled to the tops of their wigwams, with their eyes and their hands stretched in agonizing earnestness to the prairie, whilst blackened warriors ran furiously through every winding maze of the village, and issuing their jarring gutturals of vengeance, as they snatched their deadly weapons from their lodges, and struck the reddened post as they furiously passed it by! Two of their hunters were bending their course down the sides of the bluff towards the village, and another broke suddenly out of a deep ravine, and yet another was seen dashing over and down the green hills, and all were goading on their horses at full speed! and then came another, and another, and all entered the village amid shouts and groans of the villagers who crowded around them; the story was told in their looks, for one was bleeding, and the blood that flowed from his naked breast had crimsoned his milk white steed as it had dripped over him; another grasped in his left hand a scalp that was reeking in blood—and in the other his whip—another grasped nothing, save the reins in one hand and the mane of the horse in the other, having thrown his bow and his arrows

721 away, and trusted to the fleetness of his horse for his safety; yet the story was audibly told, and the fatal tragedy recited in irregular and almost suffocating ejaculations—the names of the dead were in turns pronounced and screams and shrieks burst forth at their recital—murmurs and groans ran through the village, and this happy little community were in a moment smitten with sorrow and distraction.

Their proud band of hunters who had started full of glee and mirth in the morning, had been surrounded by their enemy, the Sioux, and eight of them killed. The Sioux, who had probably reconnoitred their village during the night, and ascertained that they were dancing for buffaloes, laid a stratagem to entrap them in the following manner:—Some six or eight of them appeared the next morning (on a distant bluff, in sight of their sentinel) under the skins of buffaloes, imitating the movements of those animals whilst grazing; and being discovered by the sentinel, the intelligence was telegraphed to the village, which brought out their hunters as I have described. The masked buffaloes were seen grazing on the top of a high bluff, and when the hunters had approached within half a mile or so of them, they suddenly disappeared over the hill. Louison Frénié, who was leading the little band of hunters, became at that moment suspicious of so strange a movement, and came to a halt * * *

* "Look"! (said a Mandan, pointing to a little ravine to the right, and at the foot of the hill, from which suddenly broke some forty or fifty furious Sioux, on fleet horses and under full whip, who were rushing upon them); they wheeled, and in front of them came another band more furious from the other side of the hill! they started for home (poor fellows), and strained every nerve; but the Sioux were too fleet for them; and every now and then, the whizzing arrow and the lance were herd to rip the flesh of their naked backs, and a grunt and a groan, as they tumbled from their horses. Several miles were run in this desperate race; and Frénié got home, and several of the Mandans, though eight of them were killed and scalped by the way.

So ended that day and the hunt; but many a day and sad, will last the grief of those whose hearts were broken on that unlucky occasion.

This day, though, my readers, has been one of a more joyful kind, for the Great Spirit, who was indignant at so flagrant an injustice, has sent the Mandans an abundance of buffaloes; and all hearts have joined in a general thanksgiving to Him for his goodness and justice.

LETTER—No. 19.

MANDAN VILLAGE, *UPPER MISSOURI.*

000 In my last Letter I gave an account of the buffalo dance, and in future epistles may give some descriptions of a dozen other kinds of dance, which these people have in common with other tribes; but in the present Letter I shall make an endeavour to confine my observations to several other customs and forms, which are very curious and peculiar to the Mandans.

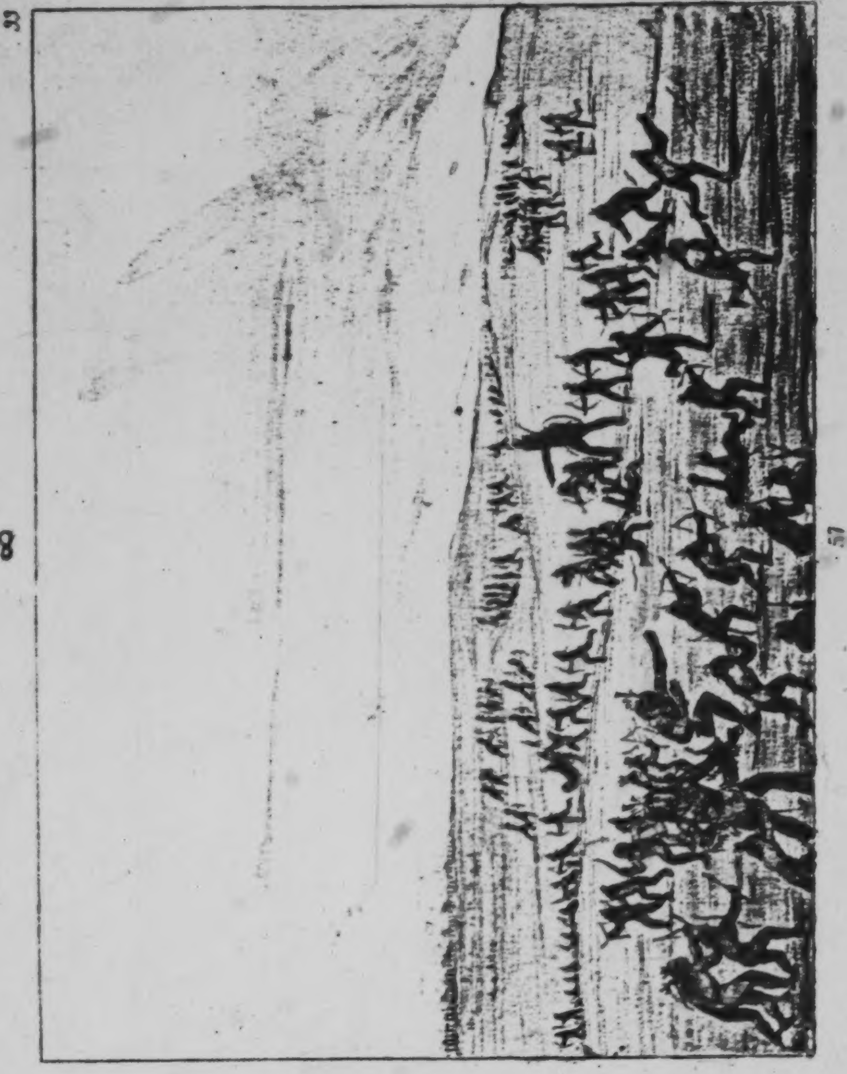
868 Of these, one of the most pleasing is the *sham-fight* and sham scalp-dance of the Mandan boys, which is a part of their regular exercise, and constitutes a material branch of their education. During the pleasant mornings of the summer, the little boys between the age of seven and fifteen are called out, to the number of several hundred, and being divided into two companies, each of which is headed by some experienced warrior, who leads them on, in the character of a teacher; they are led out into the prairie at sunrise, where this curious discipline is regularly taught them (PLATE 57). Their bodies are naked, and each one has a little bow in his left hand and a number of arrows made of large spears of grass, which are harmless in their effects. Each one has also a little belt or girdle around his waist, in which he carries a knife made of a piece of wood and equally harmless—on the tops of their heads are slightly attached small tufts of grass, which answer as scalps, and in this plight, they follow the dictates of their experienced leaders, who lead them through the judicious evolutions of Indian warfare—of feints—of retreats—of attacks—and at last to a general fight. Many manœuvres are gone through, and eventually they are brought up face to face, within fifteen or twenty feet of each other, with their leaders at their head stimulating them on. Their bows are bent upon each other and their missiles flying, whilst they are dodging and fending them off.

If any one is struck with an arrow on any vital part of his body, he is obliged to fall, and his adversary rushes up to him, places his foot upon him, and snatching from his belt his wooden knife, grasps hold of his victim's scalp-lock of grass, and making a feint at it with his wooden knife, twitches it off and puts it into his belt, and enters again into the ranks and front of battle.

This mode of training generally lasts an hour or more in the morning,

7: Catlin R, E-5 (1832-1840) 1857
NQ17 Mandan NQ17

868

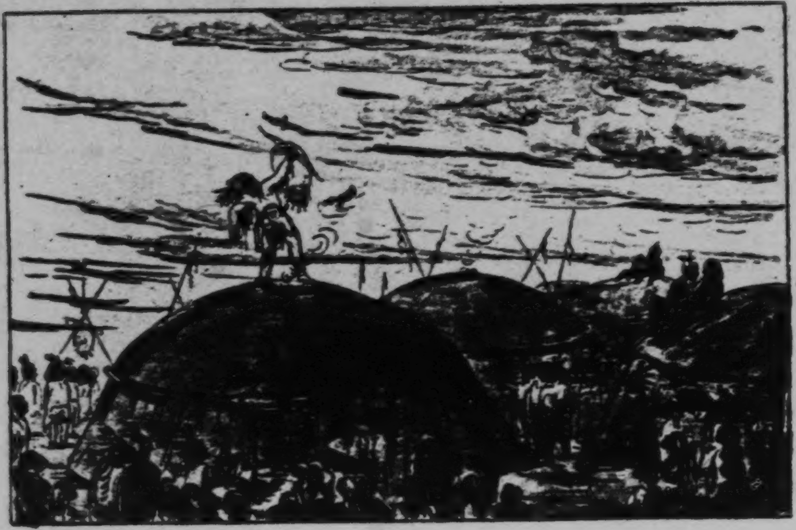


[facing p. 131]

7: Catlin R, E-5 (1832-1840) 1857

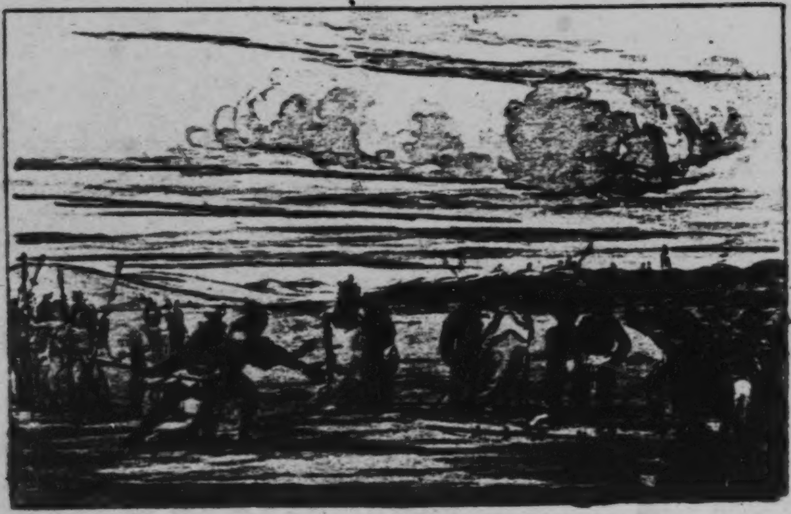
NQ17 Mandan NQ17

789
361



58

524



59

[facing p. 132]

868 and is performed on an empty stomach, affording them a rigid and wholesome exercise, whilst they are instructed in the important science of war. Some five or six miles of ground are run over during these evolutions, giving suppleness to their limbs and strength to their muscles, which last and benefit them through life.

After this exciting exhibition is ended, they all return to their village, where the chiefs and braves pay profound attention to their vaunting, and applaud them for their artifice and valour.

Those who have taken scalps then step forward, brandishing them and making their boast as they enter into the *scalp-dance* (in which they are also instructed by their leaders or teachers), jumping and yelling—brandishing their scalps, and reciting their *sanguinary deeds*, to the great astonishment of their tender aged sweethearts, who are gazing with wonder upon them.

526
525 The games and amusements of these people are in most respects like those of the other tribes, consisting of ball plays—game of the moccasin, of the platter—feats of archery - horse-racing, &c.; and they have yet another, which may be said to be their favourite amusement, and unknown to the other tribes about them. The game of Tchung-kee, a beautiful athletic exercise, which they seem to be almost unceasingly practicing whilst the weather is fair, and they have nothing else of moment to demand their attention. This game is decidedly their favourite amusement, and is played near to the village on a pavement of clay, which has been used for that purpose until it has become as smooth and hard as a floor. For this game two champions form their respective parties, by choosing alternately the most famous players, until their requisite numbers are made up. Their bettings are then made, and their stakes are held by some of the chiefs or others present The play commences (PLATE 59) with two (one from each party), who start off upon a trot, abreast of each other, and one of them rolls in advance of them, on the pavement, a little ring of two or three inches in diameter, cut out of a stone; and each one follows it up with his "tchung-kee" (a stick of six feet in length, with little bits of leather projecting from its sides of an inch or more in length), which he throws before him as he runs, sliding it along upon the ground after the ring, endeavouring to place it in such a position when it stops, that the ring may fall upon it, and receive one of the little projections of leather through it, which counts for game, one, or two, or four, according to the position of the leather on which the ring is lodged. The last winner always has the rolling of the ring, and both start and throw the tchung-kee together; if either fails to receive the ring or to lie in a certain position, it is a forfeiture of the amount of the number he was nearest to, and he loses his throw; when another steps into his place. This game is a very difficult one to describe, so as to give an exact idea of it, unless one can see it played—it is a game of great beauty and fine bodily exercise, and these people become excessively fascinated with it; often gambling away every thing they possess, and even sometimes, when everything else was gone, have been known to

526 525 stake their liberty upon the issue of these games, offering themselves as slaves to their opponents in case they get beaten.

796 *Feasting* and *fasting* are important customs observed by the Mandans, as well as by most other tribes, at stated times and for particular purposes. These observances are strictly religious and rigidly observed. There are many of these forms practiced amongst the Mandans, some of which are exceedingly interesting, and important also, in forming a correct estimate of the Indian character; and I shall at a future period take particular pains to lay them before my readers.

782 *Sacrificing* is also a religious custom with these people, and is performed in many different modes, and on numerous occasions. Of this custom I shall also speak more fully hereafter, merely noticing at present, some few of the hundred modes in which these offerings are made to the Good and Evil Spirits. Human sacrifices have never been made by the Mandans, nor by any of the north western tribes (so far as I can learn), excepting the Pawnees of the Platte; who have, undoubtedly, observed such an inhuman practice in former times, though they have relinquished it of late. The Mandans sacrifice their fingers to the Great Spirit, and of their worldly goods, the best and the most costly; if a horse or a dog, it must be the favourite one; if it is an arrow from their quiver, they will select the most perfect one as the most effective gift; if it is meat, it is the choicest piece cut from the buffalo or other animal; if it is anything from the stores of the Traders, it is the most costly—it is blue or scarlet cloth, which costs them in this country an enormous price, and is chiefly used for the purpose of hanging over their wigwams to decay, or to cover the scaffolds where rest the bones of their departed relations.

Of these kinds of sacrifices there are three of an interesting nature, erected over the great medicine-lodge in the centre of the village—they consist of ten or fifteen yards of blue and black cloth each, purchased from the Fur Company at fifteen or twenty dollars per yard, which are folded up so as to resemble human figures, with quills in their heads and masks on their faces. These singular-looking figures, like "*scare crows*" (PLATE 47), are erected on poles about thirty feet high, over the door of the mystery-lodge, and there are left to decay. There hangs now by the side of them another, which was added to the number a few days since, of the skin of a white buffalo, which will remain there until it decays and falls to pieces.

782 439 This beautiful and costly skin, when its history is known, will furnish a striking proof of the importance which they attach to these propitiatory offerings. But a few weeks since, a party of Mandans returned from the Mouth of the Yellow Stone, two hundred miles above, with information that a party of Blackfeet were visiting that place on business with the American Fur Company; and that they had with them a white buffalo robe for sale. This was looked upon as a subject of great importance by the chiefs, and one worthy of public consideration. A white buffalo robe is a

782 439 great curiosity, even in the country of buffaloes, and will always command an almost incredible price, from its extreme scarcity; and then, from its being the most costly article of traffic in these regions, it is usually converted into a *sacrifice*, being offered to the Great Spirit, as the most acceptable gift that can be procured. Amongst the vast herds of buffaloes which graze on these boundless prairies, there is not one in an hundred thousand, perhaps, that is white; and when such an one is obtained, it is considered great *medicine* or mystery.

On the receipt of the intelligence above-mentioned, the chiefs convened in council, and deliberated on the expediency of procuring the white robe from the Blackfeet; and also of appropriating the requisite means, and devising the proper mode of procedure for effecting the purchase. At the close of their deliberations, eight men were fitted out on eight of their best horses, who took from the Fur Company's store, on the credit of the chiefs, goods exceeding even the value of their eight horses; and they started for the Mouth of the Yellow Stone, where they arrived in due time, and made the purchase, by leaving the eight horses and all the goods which they carried; returning on foot to their own village, bringing home with them the white robe, which was looked upon by all eyes of the villagers as a thing that was vastly curious, and containing (as they express it) something of the Great Spirit. This wonderful anomaly laid several days in the chief's lodge, until public curiosity was gratified; and then it was taken by the doctors or high-priests, and with a great deal of form and mystery consecrated, and raised on the top of a long pole over the *medicine-lodge;* where it now stands in a group with the others, and will stand as an offering to the Great Spirit, until it decays and falls to the ground.

000 This Letter, as I promised in its commencement, being devoted to some of the customs peculiar to the Mandans, and all of which will be new to the world, I shall close, after recording in it an account of a laughable farce, which was enacted in this village when I was on my journey up the river, and had stopped on the way to spend a day or two in the Mandan village.

789 Readers, did you ever hear of "*Rain Makers?*" If not, sit still, and read on; but laugh not—keep cool and sober, or else you may laugh in the *beginning*, and cry at the *end* of my story. Well, I introduce to you a new character—not a *doctor* or a *high-priest*, yet a *medicine-man*, and one of the highest and most respectable order, a "*Rain Maker!*" Such dignitaries live in the Mandan nation, aye, and "*rain stoppers*" too; and even those also amongst their *conjurati*, who, like Joshua of old, have even essayed to stop the sun in his course; but from the inefficiency of their medicine or mystery, have long since descended into insignificance.

Well, the story begins thus:—The Mandans, as I have said in a former Letter, raise a great deal of corn; and sometimes a most disastrous drought will be visited on the land, destructive to their promised harvest. Such was the case when I arrived at the Mandan village on the steam-boat, Yellow-Stone. Rain had not fallen for many a day, and the dear little girls and the ugly old squaws, altogether (all of whom had fields of corn), were groaning and crying to their lords, and imploring them to intercede for rain, that their little respective patches, which were now turning pale and yellow, might not be withered, and they be deprived of the pleasure of their customary annual festivity, and the joyful occasion of the "roasting ears," and the "green corn dance."

The chiefs and doctors sympathized with the plaints of the women, and recommended patience. Great deliberation, they said, was necessary in these cases; and though they resolved on making the attempt to produce rain for the benefit of the corn; yet they very wisely resolved that to begin too soon might ensure their entire defeat in the endeavour; and that the longer they put it off, the more certain they would feel of ultimate success. So, after a few days of further delay, when the importunities of the women had become clamorous, and even mournful, and almost insupportable, the *medicine-men* assembled in the council-house, with all their mystery apparatus about them—with an abundance of wild sage, and other aromatic herbs, with a fire prepared to burn them, that their savoury odours might be sent forth to the Great Spirit. The lodge was closed to all the villagers, except some ten or fifteen young men, who were willing to hazard the dreadful alternative of making it rain, or suffer the everlasting disgrace of having made a fruitless essay.

They, only, were allowed as witnesses to the *hocus pocus* and *conjuration* devised by the doctors inside of the medicine-lodge; and they were called up by lot, each one in his turn, to spend a day upon the top of the lodge, to test the potency of his medicine; or, in other words, to see how far his voice might be heard and obeyed amongst the clouds of the heavens; whilst the doctors were burning incense in the wigwam below, and with their songs and prayers to the Great Spirit for success, were sending forth grateful fumes and odours to Him "who lives in the sun and commands the thunders of Heaven." Wah-kee (the shield) was the first who ascended the wigwam at sunrise; and he stood all day, and looked foolish, as he was counting over and over his string of mystery-beads—the whole village were assembled around him, and praying for his success. Not a cloud appeared—the day was calm and hot; and at the setting of the sun, he descended from the lodge and went home—"his *medicine* was not good," nor can he ever be a *medicine-man*.

Om-pah (the elk) was the next; he ascended the lodge at sunrise the next morning. His body was entirely naked, being covered with yellow clay. On his left arm he carried a beautiful shield, and a long lance in his right; and on his head the skin of a raven, the bird that soars amidst the clouds, and above the lightning's glare—he flourished his shield and brandished his lance, and raised his voice, but in vain; for at sunset the ground

789 was dry and the sky was clear; the squaws were crying, and their corn was withering at its roots.

War-rah-pa (the beaver) was the next; he also spent his breath in vain upon the empty air, and came down at night—and Wak-a-dah-ha-hee (the white buffalo's hair) took the stand the next morning. He is a small, but beautifully proportioned young man. He was dressed in a tunic and leggings of the skins of the mountain-sheep, splendidly garnished with quills of the porcupine, and fringed with locks of hair taken by his own hand from the heads of his enemies. On his arm he carried his shield, made of the buffalo's hide—its boss was the head of the war-eagle—and its front was ornamented with "red chains of lightning." In his left hand he clenched his sinewy bow and one single arrow. The villagers were all gathered about him; when he threw up a feather to decide on the course of the wind, and he commenced thus:—"My friends! people of the pheasants! you see me here a sacrifice—I shall this day relieve you from great distress, and bring joy amongst you; or I shall descend from this lodge when the sun goes down, and live amongs the dogs and old women all my days. My friends! you saw which way the feather flew, and I hold my shield this day in the direction where the wind comes—the lightning on my shield will draw a great cloud, and this arrow, which is selected from my quiver, and which is feathered with the quill of the white swan, will make a hole in it. My friends! this hole in the lodge at my feet, shows me the medicine-men, who are seated in the lodge below me and crying to the Great Spirit; and through it comes and passes into my nose delightful odours, which you see rising in the smoke to the Great Spirit above, who rides in the clouds and commands the winds! Three days they have sat here, my friends, and nothing has been done to relieve your distress. On the first day was Wah-kee (the shield), he could do nothing; he counted his beads and came down—his medicine was not good—his name was bad, and it kept off the rain. The next was Om-pah (the elk); on his head the raven was seen, who flies *above* the storm, and he failed. War-rah-pa (the beaver) was the next, my friends; the beaver lives *under* the *water*, and he never wants it to rain. My friends! I see you are in great distress, and nothing has yet been done; this shield belonged to my father the White Buffalo; and the lightning you see on it is red; it was taken from a black cloud, and that cloud will come over us to-day. I am the white buffalo's hair—and I am the son of my father."

In this manner flourished and manœuvred Wak-a-dah-ha-hee (the white [776] buffalo's hair), alternately addressing the audience and the heavens—and holding converse with the winds and the "*je-bi*" (spirits) that are floating about in them—stamping his foot over the heads of the *magi*, who were involved in mysteries beneath him, and invoking the spirits of darkness and light to send rain, to gladden the hearts of the Mandans.

It happened on this memorable day about noon, that the steam-boat

7: Catlin R, E-5 (1832-1840) 1857

NQ17 Mandan NQ17

789 N

Yellow Stone, on her first trip up the Missouri River, approached and anded at the Mandan Village, as I have described in a former epistle. *I* was lucky enough to be a passenger on this boat, and helped to fire a salute of twenty guns of twelve pounds calibre, when we first came in sight of the village, some three or four miles below. These guns introduced a *new sound* into this strange country, which the Mandans at first supposed to be thunder; and the young man upon the lodge, who turned it to good ccount, was gathering fame in rounds of applause, which were repeated and echoed through the whole village; all eyes were centred upon him —chiefs envied him—mothers' hearts were beating high whilst they were decorating and leading up their fair daughters to offer him in marriage, on his signal success. The medicine-men had left the lodge, and came out to bestow upon him the envied title of "*medicine-man,*" or "*doctor,*" which he had so deservedly won—wreaths were prepared to decorate his brows, and eagle's plumes and calumets were in readiness for him; his friends were all rejoiced—his enemies wore on their faces a silent gloom and hatred; and his old sweethearts, who had formerly cast him off, gazed intensely upon him, as they glowed with the burning fever of repentance.

During all this excitement, Wak-a-dah-ha-hee kept his position, assuming the most commanding and threatening attitudes; brandishing his shield in the direction of the thunder (PLATE 58), although there was not a cloud to be seen, until he (poor fellow), being elevated above the rest of the village, espied, to his inexpressible amazement, the steam-boat ploughing its way up the windings of the river below; puffing her steam from her pipes, and sending forth the thunder from a twelve-pounder on her deck! * * * The White Buffalo's Hair stood motionless and turned pale, he looked awhile, and turned to the chief and to the multitude, and addressed them with a trembling lip—"My friends, we will get no rain!—there are, you see, no clouds; but my medicine is great—I have brought a *thunder boat!* look and see it! the thunder you hear is out of her mouth, and the lightning which you see is on the waters!"

At this intelligence, the whole village flew to the tops of their wigwams, or to the bank of the river, from whence the steamer was in full view, and ploughing along, to their utter dismay and confusion.

In this promiscuous throng of chiefs, doctors, women, children and dogs, was mingled Wak-a-dah-ha-hee (the white buffalo's hair), having descended from his high place to mingle with the frightened throng.

Dismayed at the approach of so strange and unaccountable an object, the Mandans stood their ground but a few moments; when, by an order of the chiefs, all hands were ensconced within the piquets of their village, and all the warriors armed for desperate defence. A few moments brought the boat in front of the village, and all was still and quiet as death; not a Mandan was to be seen upon the banks. The steamer was moored, and three or four of the chiefs soon after, walked boldly down the bank and on to her

789 deck, with a spear in one hand and the calumet or pipe of peace in the other. The moment they stepped on board they met (to their great surprise and joy) their old friend, Major Sanford, their agent, which circumstance put an instant end to all their fears. The villagers were soon apprized of the fact, and the whole race of the beautiful and friendly Mandans was paraded on the bank of the river, in front of the steamer.

The "rain maker," whose apprehensions of a public calamity brought upon the nation by his extraordinary *medicine*, had, for the better security of his person from apprehended vengeance, secreted himself in some secure place, and was the last to come forward, and the last to be convinced that this visitation was a friendly one from the white people; and that his *medicine* had not in the least been instrumental in bringing it about. This information, though received by him with much caution and suspicion, at length gave him great relief, and quieted his mind as to his danger. Yet still in his breast there was a rankling thorn, though he escaped the dreaded vengeance which he had a few moments before apprehended as at hand; as he had the mortification and disgrace of having failed in his mysterious operations. He set up, however (during the day, in his conversation about the strange arrival), his *medicines*, as the cause of its approach; asserting everywhere and to everybody, that he knew of its coming, and that he had by his magic brought the occurrence about. This plea, however, did not get him much audience; and in fact, everything else was pretty much swallowed up in the guttural talk, and bustle, and gossip about the mysteries of the "thunder-boat;" and so passed the day, until just at the approach of evening, when the "White Buffalo's Hair" (more watchful of such matters on this occasion than most others) observed that a black cloud had been jutting up in the horizon, and was almost directly over the village! In an instant his shield was on his arm, and his bow in his hand, and he again upon the lodge! stiffened and braced to the last sinew, he stood, with his face and his shield presented to the cloud, and his bow drawn. He drew the eyes of the whole village upon him as he vaunted forth his super-human powers, and at the same time commanding the cloud to come nearer, that he might draw down its contents upon the heads and the corn-fields of the Mandans! In this wise he stood, waving his shield over his head, stamping his foot and frowning as he drew his bow and threatened the heavens, commanding it to rain—his bow was bent, and the arrow drawn to its head, was sent to the cloud, and he exclaimed, "My friends, it is done! Wak-a-dah-ha-hee's arrow has entered that black cloud, and the Mandans will be wet with the water of the skies!" His predictions were true;—in a few moments the cloud was over the village, and the rain fell in torrents. He stood for some time wielding his weapons and presenting his shield to the sky, while he boasted of his power and the efficacy of his *medicine*, to those who had been about him, but were now driven to the shelter of their wigwams. He, at length, finished his vaunts and his threats, and descended from his high place (in which he had been perfectly drenched), prepared to receive the honours and the homage that were due to one so potent in his mysteries; and to receive the style and title of "*medicine-man.*" This is one of a hundred different modes in which a man in Indian countries acquires the honourable appellation.

This man had "made it rain," and of course was to receive more than usual honours, as he had done much more than ordinary men could do. All eyes were upon him, and all were ready to admit that he was skilled in the magic art; and must be so nearly allied to the Great or Evil Spirit, that he must needs be a man of great and powerful influence in the nation, and well entitled to the style of doctor or *medicine-man.*

Readers, there are two facts relative to these strange transactions, which are infallibly true, and should needs be made known. The first is, that when the Mandans undertake to make it rain, *they never fail to succeed*, for their ceremonies never stop until rain begins to fall. The second is equally true, and is this:—that he who has once "*made it rain*," never attempts it again; his medicine is undoubted—and on future occasions of the kind, he stands aloof, who has once done it in presence of the whole village giving an opportunity to other young men who are ambitious to signalize themselves in the same way.

During the memorable night of which I have just spoken, the steam-boat remained by the side of the Mandan village, and the rain that had commenced falling continued to pour down its torrents until midnight; black thunder roared, and livid lightning flashed until the heavens appeared to be lit up with one unceasing and appalling glare. In this frightful moment of consternation, a flash of lightning buried itself in one of the earth-covered lodges of the Mandans, and killed a beautiful girl. Here was food and fuel fresh for their superstitions; and a night of vast tumult and excitement ensued. The dreams of the new-made medicine-man were troubled, and he had dreadful apprehensions for the coming day—for he knew that he was subject to the irrevocable decree of the chiefs and doctors, who canvass every strange and unaccountable event, with close and superstitious scrutiny, and let their vengeance fall without mercy upon its immediate cause.

He looked upon his well-earned fame as likely to be withheld from him; and also considered that his life might perhaps be demanded as the forfeit for this girl's death, which would certainly be charged upon him. He looked upon himself as culpable, and supposed the accident to have been occasioned by his criminal desertion of his post, when the steam-boat was approaching the village. Morning came, and he soon learned from some of his friends, the opinions of the wise men; and also the nature of the tribunal that was preparing for him; he sent to the prairie for his three horses, which were brought in, and he mounted the *medicine-lodge*, around which, in a few moments, the villagers were all assembled. "My friends! (said he) I see you all around me, and I am before you; my medicine, you see, is great—it is

789 *too great*—I am young, and I was too fast—I knew not when to stop. The wigwam of Mah-sish is laid low, and many are the eyes that weep for Ko-ka (the antelope;) Wak-a-dah-ha-hee gives three horses to gladden the hearts of those who weep for Ko-ka; his medicine was great—his arrow pierced the black cloud, and the lightning came, and the *thunder-boat* also! who says the medicine of Wak-a-dah-ha-hee is not strong?"

At the end of this sentence an unanimous shout of approbation ran through the crowd, and the "Hair of the White Buffalo" descended amongst them, where he was greeted by shakes of the hand; and amongst whom he now lives and thrives under the familiar and honourable appellation of the "BIG DOUBLE MEDICINE."

LETTER—No. 20.

MANDAN VILLAGE, *UPPER MISSOURI.*

461 THIS day has been one of unusual mirth and amusement amongst the Mandans, and whether on account of some annual celebration or not, I am as yet unable to say, though I think such is the case; for these people have many days which, like this, are devoted to festivities and amusements.

Their lives, however, are lives of idleness and ease, and almost all their days and hours are spent in innocent amusements. Amongst a people who have no office hours to attend to—no professions to study, and of whom but very little time is required in the chase, to supply their families with food, it would be strange if they did not practice many games and amusements, and also become exceedingly expert in them.

I have this day been a spectator of games and plays until I am fatigued with looking on; and also by lending a hand, which I have done; but with so little success as only to attract general observation, and as generally to excite the criticisms and laughter of the squaws and little children.

526 I have seen a fair exhibition of their archery this day, in a favourite amusement which they call the "*game of the arrow*" (see PLATE 60), where the young men who are the most distinguished in this exercise, assemble on the prairie at a little distance from the village, and having paid, each one, his "entrance-fee," such as a shield, a robe, a pipe, or other article, step forward in turn, shooting their arrows into the air, endeavouring to see who can get the greatest number flying in the air at one time, thrown from the same bow. For this, the number of eight or ten arrows are clenched in the left hand with the bow, and the first one which is thrown is elevated to such a degree as will enable it to remain the longest time possible in the air, and while it is flying, the others are discharged as rapidly as possible; and he who succeeds in getting the greatest number up at once, is "best," and takes the goods staked.

In looking on at this amusement, the spectator is surprised; not at the great distance to which the arrows are actually sent; but at the quickness of fixing them on the string, and discharging them in succession; which is no doubt, the result of great practice, and enables the most expert

526 of them to get as many as eight arrows up before the first one reaches the
ground.

For the successful use of the bow, as it is used through all this region of
526 country on horseback, and that invariably at full speed, the great object of
224 practice is to enable the bowman to draw the bow with suddenness and
instant effect; and also to repeat the shots in the most rapid manner. As
their game is killed from their horses' backs while at the swiftest rate—and
their enemies fought in the same way; and as the horse is the swiftest animal
of the prairie, and always able to bring his rider alongside, within a
few paces of his victim; it will easily be seen that the Indian has little use
in throwing his arrow more than a few paces; when he leans quite low
on his horse's side, and drives it with astonishing force, capable of
producing instant death to the buffalo, or any other animal in the country.
The bows which are generally in use in these regions I have described in a
former Letter, and the effects produced by them at the distance of a few
paces is almost beyond relief, considering their length, which is not
often over three,—and sometimes not exceeding two and a half feet. It can
easily be seen, from what has been said, that the Indian has little use or
object in throwing the arrow to any great distance. And as it is very seldom
that they can be seen shooting at a target, I doubt very much
whether their skill in such practice would compare with that attained
to in many parts of the civilized world; but with the same weapon,
and dashing forward at fullest speed on the wild horse, without the use
of the rein, when the shot is required to be made with the most instantaneous
effect, I scarcely think it possible that any people can be found
more skilled, and capable of producing more deadly effects with the bow.

The horses which the Indians ride in this country are invariably the wild
231 horses, which are found in great numbers on the prairies; and have, unquestionably,
strayed from the Mexican borders, into which they were
introduced by the Spanish invaders of that country; and now range and
subsist themselves, in winter and summer, over the vast plains of prairie
that stretch from the Mexican frontiers to Lake Winnipeg on the North, a
distance of 3000 miles. These horses are all of small stature, of the pony
order; but a very hardy and tough animal, being able to perform for the
Indians a continual and essential service. They are taken with the *laso*,
[48] which is a long halter or thong, made of raw-hide, of some fifteen or twenty
yards in length, and which the Indians throw with great dexterity; with a
noose at one end of it, which drops over the head of the animal they wish
to catch, whilst running at full speed—when the Indian dismounts from
his own horse, and holding to the end of the laso, choaks the animal
down, and afterwards tames and converts him to his own use.

Scarcely a man in these regions is to be found, who is not the owner of
422 one or more of these horses; and in many instances of eight, ten, or even
twenty, which he values as his own personal property.

231 526 The Indians are hard and cruel masters; and, added to their cruelties is the sin that is familiar in the Christian world, of sporting with the limbs and the lives of these noble animals. *Horse-racing* here, as in all more enlightened communities, is one of the most exciting amusements, and one of the most extravagant modes of gambling.

I have been this day a spectator to scenes of this kind, which have been enacted in abundance, on a course which they have, just back of their village; and although I never had the least taste for this cruel amusement in my own country, yet, I must say, I have been not a little amused and pleased with the thrilling effect which these exciting scenes have produced amongst so wild and picturesque a group.

I have made a sketch of the ground and the group, as near as I could (PLATE 61); shewing the manner of "starting" and "coming out," which vary a little from the customs of the *knowing* world; but in other respects, I believe, a horse-race is the same all the world over.

727 Besides these, many have been the amusements of this day, to which I have been an eye-witness; and since writing the above, I have learned the cause of this unusual expression of hilarity and mirth; which was no more nor less than the safe return of a small war-party, who had been so long out without any tidings having been received of them—that they had long since been looked upon as sacrificed to the fates of war and lost. This party was made up of the most distinguished and desperate young men of the tribe, who had sallied out against the Riccarees, and taken the most solemn oath amongst themselves never to return without achieving a victory. They had wandered long and faithfully about the country, following the trails of their enemy; when they were attacked by a numerous party, and lost several of their men and all their horses. In this condition, to evade the scrutiny of their enemy, who were closely investing the natural route to their village; they took a circuitous range of the country, to enable them to return with their lives, to their village.

In this plight, it seems, I had dropped my little canoe alongside of them, while descending from the Mouth of Yellow Stone to this place, not many weeks since; where they had bivouacked or halted, to smoke and consult on the best and safest mode of procedure. At the time of meeting them, not knowing anything of their language, they were unable to communicate their condition to me, and more probably were afraid to do so even if they could have done it, from apprehension that we might have given some account of them to their enemies. I rested my canoe an hour or so with them during which time they treated us with an indifferent reserve, yet respectfully; and we passed on our way, without further information of them or their plans than the sketch that I there made (PLATE 63), and which I shall preserve and value as one of the most pleasing groups I ever have had the pleasure to see. Seated on their buffalo robes, which were spread upon the grass, with their respective weapons laying about them, and lighting their pipes at a

727 little fire which was kindled in the centre—the chief or leader of the party, with his arms stacked behind him, and his long head-dress of war-eagles' quills and ermine falling down over his back, whilst he sat in a contemplative and almost desponding mood, was surely one of the most striking and beautiful illustrations of a natural hero that I ever looked upon.

These gallant fellows got safely home to their village, and the numerous expressions of joy for their return, which I have this day witnessed, have so much fatigued me that I write brief, and close my Letter here.

LETTER—No. 21.

MANDAN VILLAGE, *UPPER MISSOURI.*

159 In a former Letter I gave some account of Mah-to-toh-pa (the four bears), second chief of the Mandans, whom I said I had painted at full length, in a splendid costume. I therein said, also, that "this extraordinary man, though second in office, is undoubtedly the first and most popular man in the nation. Free, generous, elegant, and gentlemanly in his deportment—handsome, brave and valiant; wearing a robe on his back, with the history of all his battles painted on it, which would fill a book of themselves if they were properly enlarged and translated."

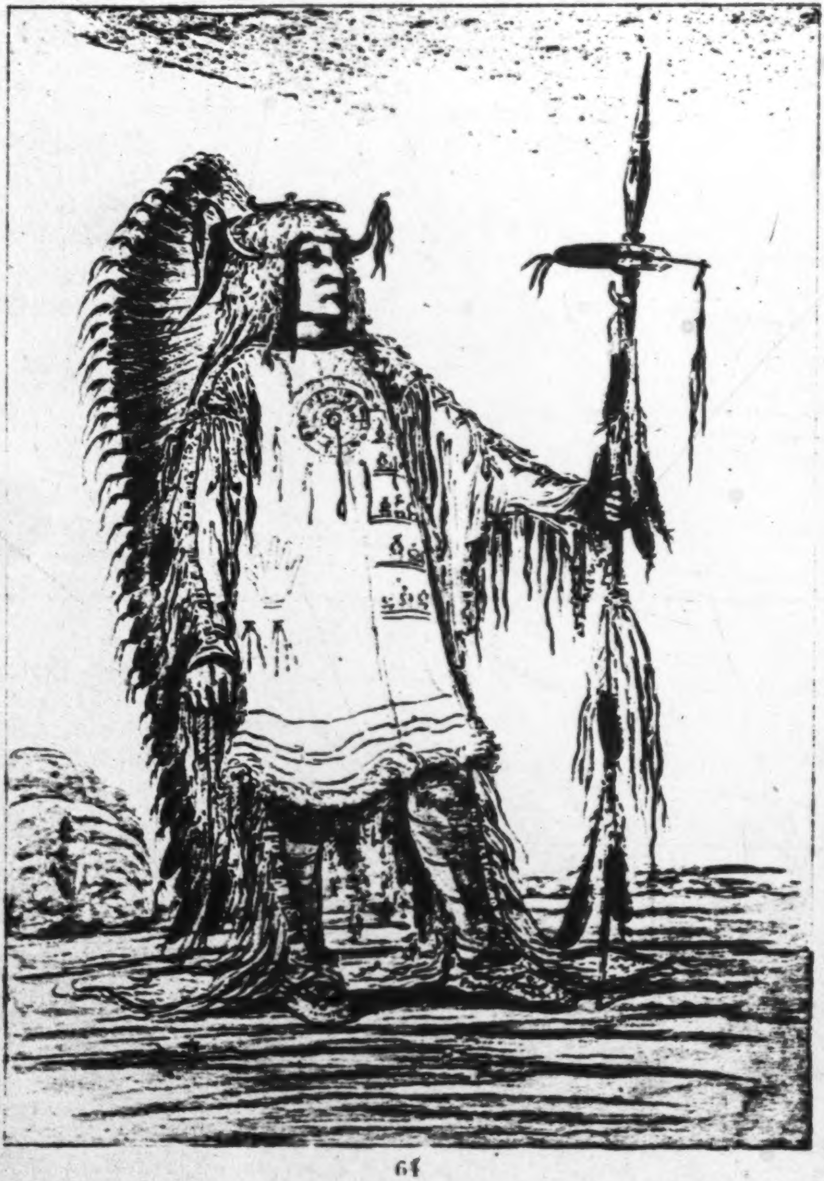
I gave you also, in another epistle, an account of the manner in which he invited me to a feast in his hospitable wigwam, at the same time presenting me a beautifully garnished robe; and I promised to say more of him on a future occasion. My readers will therefore pardon me for devoting a Letter or two at this time, to a sketch of this extraordinary man, which I will give in as brief a manner as possible, by describing the costume in which I painted his portrait; and afterwards reciting the most remarkable incidents of his life, as I had them from the Traders and the Indian agents, and afterwards corroborated by his own words, translated to me as he spoke, whilst I was writing them down.

The dress of Mah-to-toh-pa then, the greater part of which I have represented in his full-length portrait, and which I shall now describe, was purchased of him after I had painted his picture; and every article of it can be seen in my Indian Gallery by the side of the portrait, provided I succeed in getting them home to the civilized world without injury.

Mah-to-toh-pa had agreed to stand before me for his portrait at an early hour of the next morning, and on that day I sat with my palette of colours prepared, and waited till twelve o'clock, before he could leave his toilette with feelings of satisfaction as to the propriety of his looks and the arrangement of his equipments; and at that time it was announced, that "Mah-to-toh-pa was coming in full dress!" I looked out of the door of the wigwam, and saw him approaching with a firm and elastic step, accompanied by a great crowd of women and children, who were gazing on him with admiration, and escorting him to my room. No tragedian ever trod the stage, nor gladiator ever entered the Roman Forum, with more grace and manly dignity than did Mah-to-toh-pa enter the wigwam, where I was in readiness to receive him. He took his attitude before me (PLATE 64), and with the sternness of a Brutus and the stillness of a statue, he stood until the dark-

7: Catlin R, E-5 (1832-1840) 1857

NQ17 Mandan NQ17



61

292
159

[facing p. 145]

159 ness of night broke upon the solitary stillness. His dress, which was a very splendid one, was complete in all its parts, and consisted of a shirt or tunic, leggings, moccasins, head-dress, necklace, shield, bow and quiver, lance, tobacco-sack, and pipe; robe, belt, and knife; medicine-bag, tomahawk, and war-club, or *po-ko-mo-kon*.

292 The shirt, of which I have spoken, was made of two skins of the mountain-sheep, beautifully dressed, and sewed together by seams which rested upon the arms; one skin hanging in front, upon the breast, and the other falling down upon the back; the head being passed between them, and they falling over and resting on the shoulders. Across each shoulder, and somewhat in the form of an epaulette, was a beautiful band; and down each arm from the neck to the hand was a similar one, of two inches in width (and crossing the other at right angles on the shoulder) beautifully embroidered with porcupine quills worked on the dress, and covering the seams. To the lower edge of these bands the whole way, at intervals of half an inch, were attached long locks of black hair, which he had taken with his own hand from the heads of his enemies whom he had slain in battle, and which he thus wore as a trophy, and also as an ornament to his dress. The front and back of the shirt were curiously garnished in several parts with porcupine quills and paintings of the battles he had fought, and also with representations of the victims that had fallen by his hand. The bottom of the dress was bound or hemmed with ermine skins, and tassels of ermines' tails were suspended from the arms and the shoulders.

The *Leggings*, which were made of deer skins, beautifully dressed, and fitting tight to the leg, extended from the feet to the hips, and were fastened to a belt which was passed around the waist. These, like the shirt, had a similar band, worked with porcupine quills of richest dyes, passing down the seam on the outer part of the leg, and fringed also the whole length of the leg, with the scalp-locks taken from his enemies' heads.

The *Moccasins* were of buckskin, and covered in almost every part with the beautiful embroidery of porcupines' quills.

The *Head-dress*, which was superb and truly magnificent, consisted of a crest of war-eagles' quills, gracefully falling back from the forehead over the back part of the head, and extending quite down to his feet; set the whole way in a profusion of ermine, and surmounted on the top of the head, with the horns of the buffalo, shaved thin and highly polished.

The *Necklace* was made of fifty huge claws or nails of the grizzly bear, ingeniously arranged on the skin of an otter, and worn, like the scalp-locks, as a trophy—as an evidence unquestionable, that he had contended with and overcome that desperate enemy in open combat.

414 His *Shield* was made of the hide of the buffalo's neck, and hardened with the glue that was taken from its hoofs; its boss was the skin of a pole-cat, and its edges were fringed with rows of eagles' quills and hoofs of the antelope.

His *Bow* was of bone, and as white and beautiful as ivory; over its back

was laid, and firmly attached to it, a coating of deers' sinews, which gave 411
it its elasticity, and of course death to all that stood inimically before it. Its string was three stranded and twisted of sinews, which many a time had twanged and sent the whizzing death to animal and to human victims.

The *Quiver* was made of a panther's skin and hung upon his back, charged with its deadly arrows; some were poisoned and some were not; they were feathered with hawks' and eagles' quills; some were clean and innocent, and pure, and others were stained all over, with animal and human blood that was dried upon them. Their blades or points were of flints, and some of steel; and altogether were a deadly magazine.

The *Lance* or spear was held in his left hand; its blade was two-edged and of polished steel, and the blood of several human victims was seen dried upon it, one over the other; its shaft was of the toughest ash, and ornamented at intervals with tufts of war-eagles' quills.

His *Tobacco-sack* was made of the skin of an otter, and tastefully garnished with quills of the porcupine; in it was carried his *k'nick-k'neck*, 276
(the bark of the red willow, which is smoked as a substitute for tobacco), it contained also his flint and steel, and spunk for lighting———

His *Pipe*, which was ingeniously carved out of the red steatite (or pipe-stone), the stem of which was three feet long and two inches wide, made from the stalk of the young ash; about half its length was wound with delicate braids of the porcupine's quills, so ingeniously wrought as to represent figures of men and animals upon it. It was also ornamented with the skins and beaks of wood-peckers' heads, and the hair of the white buffalo's tail. The lower half of the stem was painted red, and on its edges it bore the notches he had recorded for the snows (or years) of his life.

His *Robe* was made of the skin of a young buffalo bull, with the fur on 292
one side, and the other finely and delicately dressed; with all the battles of his life emblazoned on it by his own hand.

His *Belt*, which was of a substantial piece of buckskin, was firmly girded around his waist; and in it were worn his tomahawk and scalping-knife.

His *Medicine-bag* was the skin of a beaver, curiously ornamented with 415
hawks' bills and ermine. It was held in his right hand, and his *po-ko-mo-kon* (or war-club) which was made of a round stone, tied up in a piece of 411
rawhide, and attached to the end of a stick, somewhat in the form of a sling, was laid with others of his weapons at his feet.

Such was the dress of Mah-to-toh-pa when he entered my wigwam to 159
stand for his picture; but such I have not entirely represented it in his portrait; having rejected such trappings and ornaments as interfered with the grace and simplicity of the figure. He was beautifully and extravagantly dressed; and in this he was not alone, for hundreds of others are equally elegant. In plumes, and arms, and ornaments, he is not singular; but in laurels and wreaths he stands unparalleled. His breast has been bared and scarred in defence of his country, and his brows crowned with honours

159 that elevate him conspicuous above all of his nation. There is no man amongst the Mandans so generally loved, nor any one who wears a robe so justly famed and honourable as that of Mah-to-toh-pa.

I said his robe was of the skin of a young buffalo bull, and that the battles of his life were emblazoned on it; and on a former occasion, that he presented me a beautiful robe, containing all the battles of his life, which he had spent two weeks' time in copying from his original one, which he wore on his shoulders.

This robe, with his tracings on it, is the chart of his military life; and when explained, will tell more of Mah-to-toh-pa.

Some days after this robe was presented, he called upon me with Mr. Kipp, the trader and interpreter for the Mandans, and gave me of each battle there pourtrayed the following history, which was interpreted by Mr. Kipp, from his own lips, and written down by me, as we three sat upon the robe. Mr. Kipp, who is a gentleman of respectability and truth; and who has lived with these people ten years, assured me, that nearly every one of these narrations were of events that had happened whilst he had lived with them, and had been familiarly known to him; and that every word that he asserted was true

And again, reader, in this country where, of all countries I ever was in, men are the most jealous of rank and of standing; and in a community so small also, that every man's deeds of honour and chivalry are familiarly known to all; it would not be reputable, or even safe to life, for a warrior to wear upon his back the representations of battles he never had fought; professing to have done what every child in the village would know he never had done.

So then I take the records of battles on the robe of Mah-to-toh-pa to be matter of historical fact; and I proceed to give them as I wrote them down from his own lips. Twelve battle-scenes are there represented, where he has contended with his enemy, and in which he has taken fourteen of their scalps. The groups are drawn according to his own rude ideas of the arts; and I proceed to describe them in turn, as they were explained to me.

ROBE OF MAH-TO-TOH-PA (PLATE 65).

159 721 212 1. Mah-to-toh-pa kills a Sioux chief—the three heads represent the three Riccarees, whom the Sioux chief had previously killed. The Sioux chief is seen with war-paint black on his face. Mah-to-toh-pa is seen with the scalp of the Sioux in one hand, and his knife in the other, with his bow and quiver lying behind him.*

2. A Shienne chief, who sent word to Mah-to-toh-pa that he wished to fight him—was killed by Mah-to-toh-pa with a lance, in presence of a large

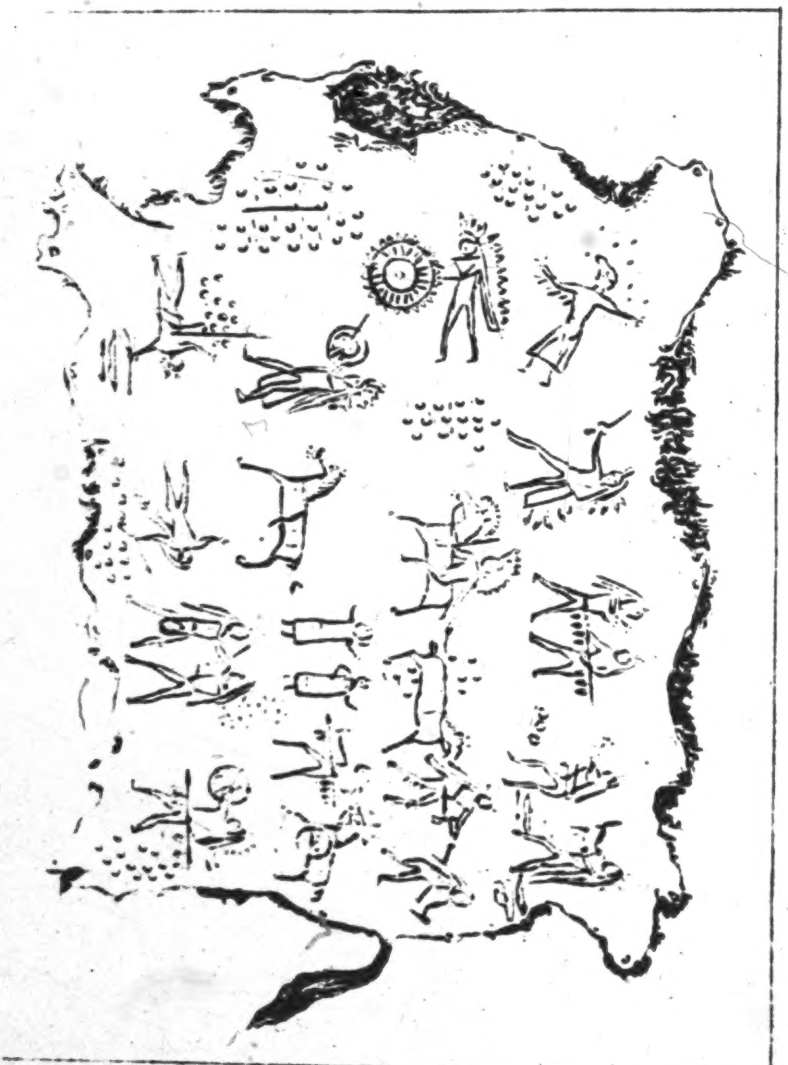
---

* The reader will see in PLATE 65, an accurate drawing of this curious robe, which now hangs in the INDIAN GALLERY, and on the following pages, each group numbered, and delineated on a larger scale, which are *fac-similes* of the drawings on the robe.

7: Catlin R, E-5 (1832-1840) 1857

NQ17 Mandan NQ17

39



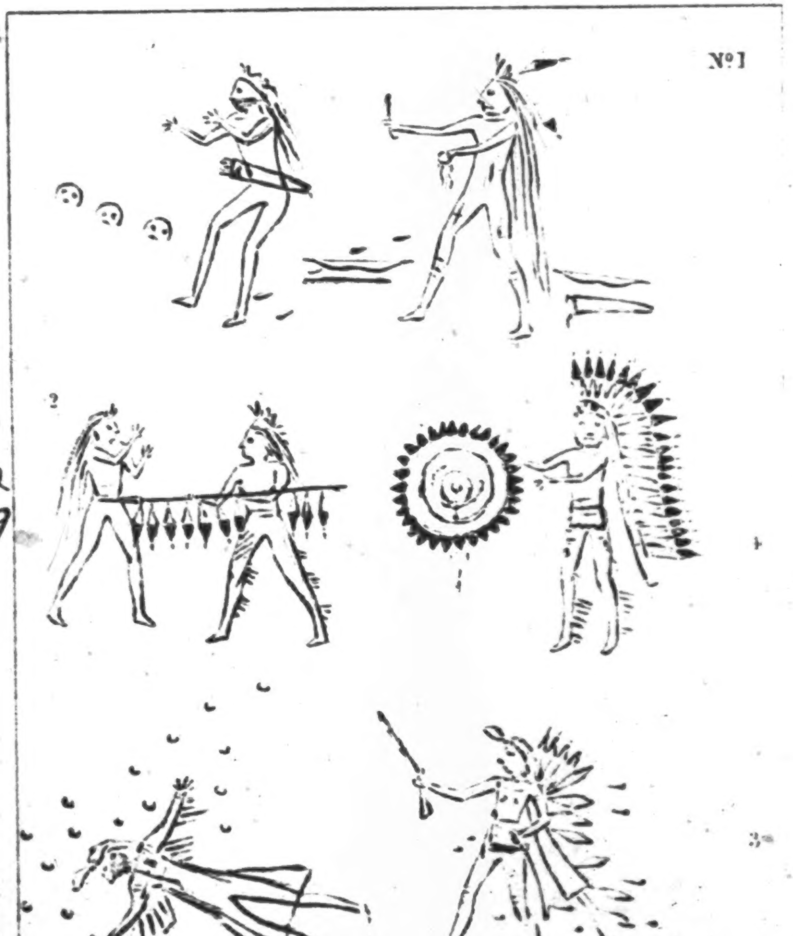
65

721
212
159

[p. 148 (A)]

7: Catlin R, E-5 (1832-1840) 1857
NQ17 Mandan NQ17

721
212
159

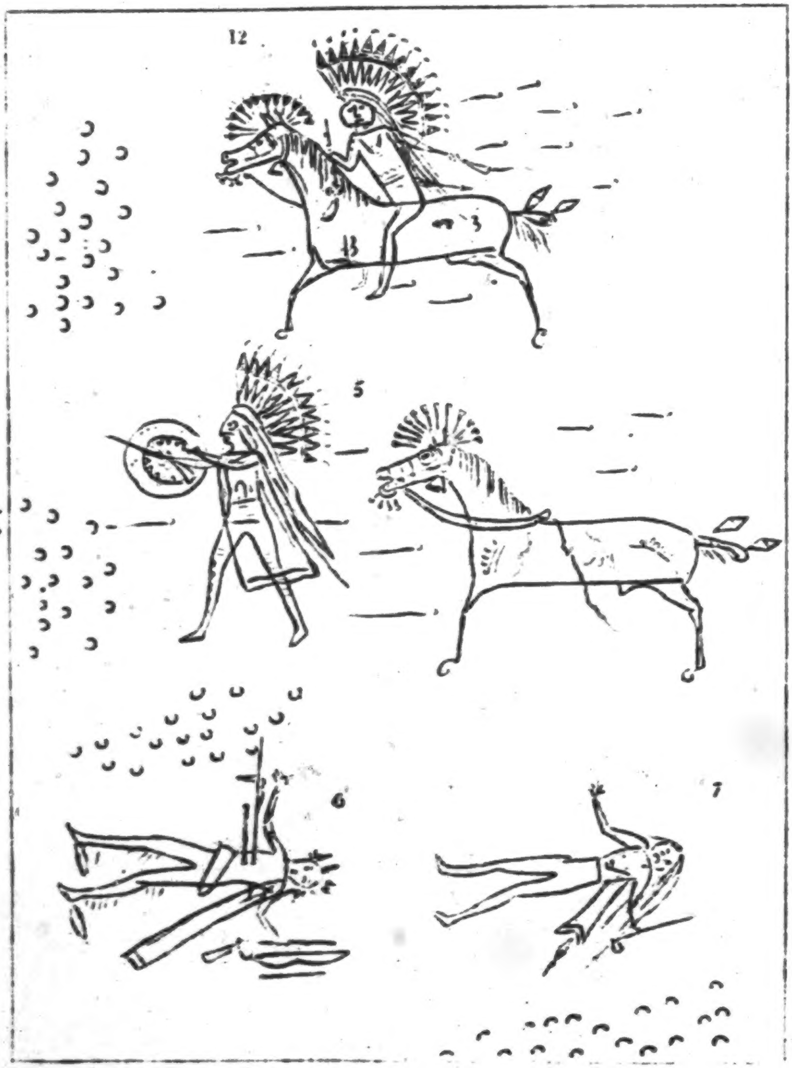


[p. 148 (B)]

7: Catlin R, E-5 (1832-1840) 1857

NQ17 Mandan NQ17

17



721
212
159

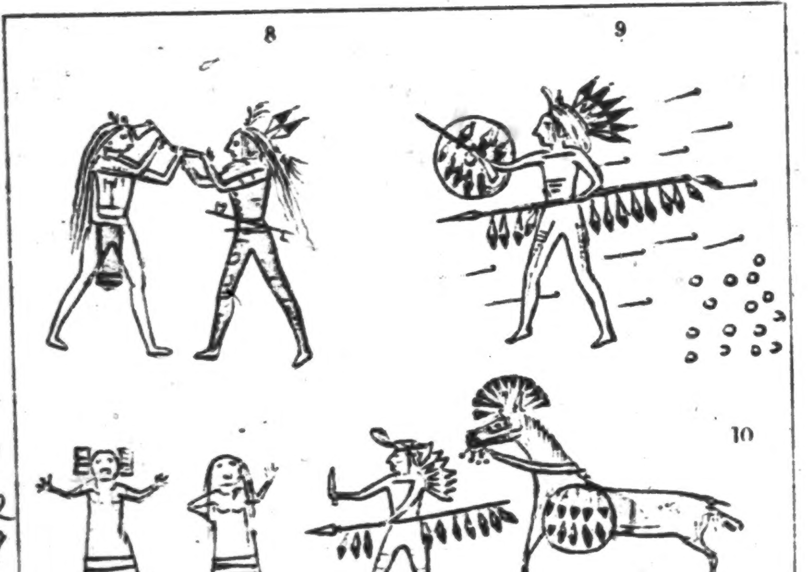
[p.148(c)]

7: Catlin R, E-5 (1832-1840) 1857

NQ17 Mandan NQ17

49

721
212
159



G. Gain

[p. 148 (D)]

159 721 212 party of Mandans and Shiennes. Mah-to-toh-pa is here known by his lance with eagles' quills on it.

3. A Shienne killed by Mah-to-toh-pa after Mah-to-toh-pa had been left by his party, badly wounded and bleeding; the twenty-five or thirty foot-tracks around, represent the number of Shiennes, who were present when the battle took place; and the bullets from their guns represented as flying all around the head of Mah-to-toh-pa.

4. Shienne chief with war-eagle head-dress, and a beautiful shield, ornamented with eagles' quills, killed by Mah-to-toh-pa. In this battle the wife of the Shienne rushed forward in a desperate manner to his assistance; but arriving too late, fell a victim. In this battle Mah-to-toh-pa obtained two scalps.

5. Mah-to-toh-pa, with a party of Riccarees, fired at by a party of Sioux; the Riccarees fled—Mah-to-toh-pa dismounted and drove his horse back, facing the enemy alone and killing one of them. Mah-to-toh-pa is here represented with a beautiful head-dress of war-eagles' quills, and one on his horse's head of equal beauty; his shield is on his arm, and the party of Sioux is represented in front of him by the number of horse tracks.

6. The brother of Mah-to-toh-pa killed by a Riccaree, who shot him with an arrow, and then running a lance through his body, left it there. Mah-to-toh-pa was the first to find his brother's body with the lance in it: he drew the lance from the body, kept it four years with the blood dried on its blade, and then, according to his oath, killed the same Riccaree with the same lance; the dead body of his brother is here seen with the arrow and lance remaining in it, and the tracks of the Riccaree's horses in front.

159 721 The following was, perhaps, one of the most extraordinary exploits of this remarkable man's life, and is well attested by Mr. Kipp, and several white men, who were living in the Mandan village at the time of its occurrence. In a skirmish, near the Mandan village, when they were set upon by their enemies, the Riccarees, the brother of Mah-to-toh-pa was missing for several days, when Mah-to-toh-pa found the body shockingly mangled, and a handsome spear left piercing the body through the heart. The spear was by him brought into the Mandan village, where it was recognized by many as a famous weapon belonging to a noted brave of the Riccarees, by the name of Won-ga-tap. This spear was brandished through the Mandan village by Mah-to-toh-pa (with the blood of his brother dried on its blade), crying most piteously, and swearing that he would some day revenge the death of his brother with the same weapon.

It is almost an incredible fact, that he kept this spear with great care in his wigwam for the space of four years, in the fruitless expectation of an opportunity to use it upon the breast of its owner; when his indignant soul, impatient of further delay, burst forth in the most uncontroulable frenzy and fury; he again brandished it through the village, and said, that the blood of his brother's heart which was seen on its blade was yet fresh, 159 721 and called loudly for revenge. "Let every Mandan (said he) be silent, and let no one sound the name of Mah-to-toh-pa—let no one ask for him, nor where he has gone, until you hear him sound the war-cry in front of the village, when he will enter it and shew you the blood of Won-ga-tap. The blade of this lance shall drink the heart's blood of Won-ga-tap, or Mah-to-toh-pa mingles his shadow with that of his brother."

With this he sallied forth from the village, and over the plains, with the lance in his hand; his direction was towards the Riccaree village, and all eyes were upon him, though none dared to speak till he disappeared over the distant grassy bluffs. He travelled the distance of two hundred miles entirely alone, with a little parched corn in his pouch, making his marches by night, and laying secreted by days, until he reached the Riccaree village; where (being acquainted with its shapes and its habits, and knowing the position of the wigwam of his doomed enemy) he loitered about in disguise, mingling himself in the obscure throng; and at last, silently and alone, observed through the rents of the wigwam, the last motions and movements of his victim, as he retired to bed with his wife: he saw him light his last pipe and smoke it "to its end"—he saw the last whiff, and saw the last curl of blue smoke that faintly steeped from its bowl—he saw the village awhile in darkness and silence, and the embers that were covered in the middle of the wigwam gone nearly out, and the last flickering light which had been gently playing over them; when he walked softly, but not slyly, into the wigwam and seated himself by the fire, over which was hanging a large pot, with a quantity of cooked meat remaining in it; and by the side of the fire, the pipe and tobacco-pouch which had just been used; and knowing that the twilight of the wigwam was not sufficient to disclose the features of his face to his enemy, he very deliberately turned to the pot and completely satiated the desperate appetite, which he had got in a journey of six or seven days, with little or nothing to eat; and then, as deliberately, charged and lighted the pipe, and sent (no doubt, in every whiff that he drew through its stem) a prayer to the Great Spirit for a moment longer for the consummation of his design. Whilst eating and smoking, the wife of his victim, while laying in bed, several times enquired of her husband, what man it was who was eating in their lodge? to which, he as many times replied, "It's no matter; let him eat, for he is probably hungry."

[574] Mah-to-toh-pa knew full well that his appearance would cause no other reply than this, from the dignitary of the nation; for, from an invariable custom amongst these Northern Indians, any one who is hungry is allowed to walk into any man's lodge and eat. Whilst smoking his last gentle and tremulous whiffs on the pipe, Mah-to-toh-pa (leaning back, and turning gradually on his side, to get a better view of the position of his enemy, and to see a little more distinctly the shapes of things) stirred the embers with his toes (readers, I had every word of this from his own lips, and every attitude and gesture acted out with his own limbs), until he saw his

way was clear; at which moment, with his lance in his hands, he rose and 159
drove it through the body of his enemy, and snatching the scalp from his 721
head, he darted from the lodge—and quick as lightning, with the lance in one hand, and the scalp in the other, made his way to the prairie! The village was in an uproar, but he was off, and no one knew the enemy who had struck the blow. Mah-to-toh-pa ran all night, and lay close during the days; thanking the Great Spirit for strengthening his heart and his arm to this noble revenge; and prayed fervently for a continuance of his aid and protection till he should get back to his own village. His prayers were heard; and on the sixth morning, at sunrise, Mah-to-toh-pa descended the bluffs, and entered the village amidst deafening shouts of applause, while he brandished and shewed to his people the blade of his lance, with the blood of his victim dried upon it, over that of his brother; and the scalp of Won-ga-tap suspended from its handle

Such was the feat represented by Mah-to-toh-pa on his robe—and the lance, of which I have just spoken, is seen in the hand of his portrait, which will stand in my Gallery, and of which I have thus formerly spoken :—"The lance or spear of Mah-to-toh-pa, when he stood for his portrait, was held in his left hand; its blade was two-edged, and of polished steel, and the blood of several human victims was seen dried upon its surface, one over the other; its shaft was of the toughest ash, and ornamented at intervals with tufts of war-eagle's quills."

In the portrait, of which I am speaking, there will be seen an eagle's quill balanced on the hilt of the lance, severed from its original position, and loose from the weapon. When I painted his portrait, he brought that quill to my wigwam in his left hand, and carefully balancing it on the lance, as seen in the painting; he desired me to be very exact with it, to have it appear as separate from, and unconnected with, the lance; and to represent a spot of blood which was visible upon it. I indulged him in his request, and then got from him the following explanation :—"That quill (said he) is great *medicine!* it belongs to the Great Spirit, and not to me—when I was running out of the lodge of Won-ga-tap, I looked back and saw that quill hanging to the wound in his side; I ran back, and pulling it out, brought it home in my left hand, and I have kept it for the Great Spirit to this day!"

"Why do you not then tie it on to the lance again, where it came off?"

"Hush-sh (said he), if the Great Spirit had wished it to be tied on in that place, it never would have come off; he has been kind to me, and I will not offend him."

7. A Riccaree killed by Mah-to-toh-pa in revenge of the death of a white 159
man killed by a Riccaree in the Fur Traders' Fort, a short time previous. 721

8. Mah-to-toh-pa, or four bears, kills a Shienne chief, who challenged him
to single combat, in presence of the two war-parties; they fought on horse- 212
back with guns, until Mah-to-toh-pa's powder-horn was shot away; they then fought with bows and arrows, until their quivers were emptied, when they

159 721 212 dismounted and fougnt single-handed. The Shienne drew his knife, and Mah-to-toh-pa had left his; they struggled for the knife, which Mah-to-toh-pa wrested from the Shienne, and killed him with it; in the struggle, the blade of the knife was several times drawn through the hand of Mah-to-toh-pa, and the blood is seen running from the wound.

This extraordinary occurrence also, was one which admits of, and deserves a more elaborate description, which I will here give as it was translated from his own lips, while he sat upon the robe, pointing to his painting of it; and at the same time brandishing the identical knife which he drew from his belt, as he was shewing how the fatal blow was given; and exhibiting the wounds inflicted in his hand, as the blade of the knife was several times drawn through it before he wrested it from his antagonist.

159 721 A party of about 150 Shienne warriors had made an assault upon the Mandan village at an early hour in the morning, and driven off a considerable number of horses, and taken one scalp. Mah-to-toh-pa, who was then a young man, but famed as one of the most valiant of the Mandans, took the lead of a party of fifty warriors, all he could at that time muster, and went in pursuit of the enemy; about noon of the second day, they came in sight of the Shiennes; and the Mandans seeing their enemy much more numerous than they had expected, were generally disposed to turn about and return without attacking them. They started to go back, when Mah-to-toh-pa galloped out in front upon the prairie, and plunged his lance into the ground; the blade was driven into the earth to its hilt—he made another circuit around, and in that circuit tore from his breast his reddened sash, which he hung upon its handle as a flag, calling out to the Mandans, "What! have we come to this? we have dogged our enemy two days, and now when we have found them, are we to turn about and go back like cowards? Mah-to-toh-pa's lance, which is red with the blood of brave men, has led you to the sight of your enemy, and you have followed it; it now stands firm in the ground, where the earth will drink the blood of Mah-to-toh-pa! you may all go back, and Mah-to-toh-pa will fight them alone!"

During this manœuvre, the Shiennes, who had discovered the Mandans behind them, had turned about and were gradually approaching, in order to give them battle; the chief of the Shienne war-party seeing and understanding the difficulty, and admiring the gallant conduct of Mah-to-toh-pa, galloped his horse forward within hailing distance, in front of the Mandans, and called out to know "who he was who had stuck down his lance and defied the whole enemy alone?"

"I am Mah-to-toh-pa, second in command of the brave and valiant Mandans."

"I have heard often of Mah-to-toh-pa, he is a great warrior—dares Mah-to-toh-pa to come forward and fight this battle with me alone, and our warriors will look on?"

"Is he a chief who speaks to Mah-to-toh-pa?"

"My scalps you see hanging to my horse's bits, and here is my lance with the ermine skins and the war-eagle's tail!"

"You have said enough."

The Shienne chief made a circuit or two at full gallop on a beautiful white horse, when he struck his lance into the ground, and left it standing by the side of the lance of Mah-to-toh-pa, both of which were waving together their little red flags, tokens of blood and defiance.

The two parties then drew nearer, on a beautiful prairie, and the two full-plumed chiefs, at full speed, drove furiously upon each other! both firing their guns at the same moment. They passed each other a little distance and wheeled, when Mah-to-toh-pa drew off his powder-horn, and by holding it up, shewed his adversary that the bullet had shattered it to pieces and destroyed his ammunition; he then threw it from him, and his gun also—drew his bow from his quiver, and an arrow, and his shield upon his left arm! The Shienne instantly did the same; *his* horn was thrown off, and his gun was thrown into the air—his shield was balanced on his arm—his bow drawn, and quick as lightning, they were both on the wing for a deadly combat! Like two soaring eagles in the open air, they made their circuits around, and the twangs of their sinewy bows were heard, and the war-whoop, as they dashed by each other, parrying off the whizzing arrows with their shields! Some lodged in their legs and others in their arms; but both protected their *bodies* with their bucklers of bull's hide. Deadly and many were the shafts that fled from their murderous bows. At length the horse of Mah-to-toh-pa fell to the ground with an arrow in his heart: his rider sprang upon his feet prepared to renew the combat; but the Shienne, seeing his adversary dismounted, sprang from his horse, and driving him back, presented the face of his shield towards his enemy, inviting him to come on!—a few shots more were exchanged thus, when the Shienne, having discharged all his arrows, held up his empty quiver and dashing it furiously to the ground, with his bow and his shield; drew and brandished his naked knife!

"Yes!" said Mah-to-toh-pa, as he threw *his* shield and quiver to the earth, and was rushing up—*he* grasped for his knife, but his belt had it not; he had left it at home! his bow was in his hand, with which he parried his antagonist's blow and felled him to the ground! A desperate struggle now ensued for the knife—the blade of it was several times drawn through the right hand of Mah-to-toh-pa, inflicting the most frightful wounds, while he was severely wounded in several parts of the body. He at length succeeded however, in wresting it from his adversary's hand, and plunged it to his heart.

By this time the two parties had drawn up in close view of each other, and at the close of the battle, Mah-to-toh-pa held up, and claimed in deadly silence, the knife and scalp of the noble Shienne chief.*

---

* This celebrated weapon with the blood of several victims dried upon its blade, now

159 721 212 9. Several hundred Minatarrees and Mandans attacked by a party of Assinneboins—all fled but Mah-to-toh-pa, who stood his ground, fired, and killed one of the enemy, putting the rest of them to flight, and driving off sixty horses! He is here seen with his lance and shield—foot-tracks of his enemy in front, and his own party's horse-tracks behind him, and a shower of bullets flying around his head; here he got the name of "*the four bears,*" as the Assinneboins said he rushed on like four bears.

10. Mah-to-toh-pa gets from his horse and kills two Ojibbeway women, and takes their scalps; done by the side of an Ojibbeway village, where they went to the river for water. He is here seen with his lance in one hand and his knife in the other—an eagle's plume head-dress on his horse, and his shield left on his horse's back. I incurred his ill-will for awhile by asking him, whether it was manly to boast of taking the scalps of women? and his pride prevented him from giving me any explanation or apology. The interpreter, however, explained to me that he had secreted himself in the most daring manner, in full sight of the Ojibbeway village, seeking to revenge a murder, where he remained six days without sustenance, and then killed the two women in full view of the tribe, and made his escape, which entitled him to the credit of a victory, though his victims were women.

11. A large party of Assinneboins entrenched near the Mandan village attacked by the Mandans and Minatarrees, who were driven back—Mah-to-toh-pa rushes into the entrenchment alone—an Indian fires at him and burns his face with the muzzle of his gun, which burst—the Indian retreats, leaving his exploded gun, and Mah-to-toh-pa shoots him through the shoulders as he runs, and kills him with his tomahawk; the gun of the Assinneboin is seen falling to the ground, and in front of him the heads of the Assinneboins in the entrenchment; the horse of Mah-to-toh-pa is seen behind him.

12. Mah-to-toh-pa between his enemy the Sioux, and his own people, with an arrow shot through him, after standing the fire of the Sioux for a long time alone. In this battle he took no scalps, yet his valour was so extraordinary that the chiefs and braves awarded him the honour of a victory. This feat is seen in the centre of the robe—head-dress of war-eagles' quills on his own and his horse's head—the tracks of his enemies' horses are seen in front of him, and bullets flying both ways all around him. With his whip in his hand, he is seen urging his horse forward, and an arrow is seen flying, and bloody, as it has passed through his body. For this wound, and the several others mentioned above, he bears the honourable scars on his body, which he generally keeps covered with red paint.

Such are the battles traced upon the robe of Mah-to-toh-pa or four bears, interpreted by J. Kipp from the words of the hero while sitting upon the robe, explaining each battle as represented.

---

hangs in the INDIAN GALLERY, with satisfactory certificates of its identity and its remarkable history, and an exact drawing of it and its scabbard can be seen in PLATE 99, *a*.

LETTER—No. 22.

MANDAN VILLAGE, *UPPER MISSOURI.*

Oh! "*horribile visu—et mirabile dictu!*" Thank God, it is over, that I have seen it, and am able to tell it to the world. 002

The *annual religious ceremony*, of four days, of which I have so often spoken, and which I have so long been wishing to see, has at last been enacted in this village; and I have, fortunately, been able to see and to understand it in most of its bearings, which was more than I had reason to expect; for no white man, in all probability, has ever been before admitted to the *medicine-lodge* during these most remarkable and appalling scenes. 796

Well and truly has it been said, that the Mandans are a strange and peculiar people; and most correctly had I been informed, that this was an important and interesting scene, by those who had, on former occasions, witnessed such parts of it as are transacted out of doors, and in front of the *medicine-lodge*.

Since the date of my last Letter, I was lucky enough to have painted the *medicine-man*, who was high-priest on this grand occasion, or conductor of the ceremonies, who had me regularly installed doctor or "*medicine*;" and who, on the morning when these grand refinements in mysteries commenced, took me by the arm, and led me into the *medicine-lodge*, where the Fur Trader, Mr. Kipp, and his two clerks accompanied me in close attendance for four days; all of us going to our own quarters at sun-down, and returning again at sun-rise the next morning.

I took my sketch-book with me, and have made many and faithful drawings of what we saw, and full notes of everything as translated to me by the interpreter; and since the close of that horrid and frightful scen which was a week ago or more, I have been closely ensconced in an eart covered wigwam, with a fine sky-light over my head, with my palette a brushes, endeavouring faithfully to put the whole of what we saw up canvass, which my companions all agree to be critically correct, and of t fidelity of which they have attached their certificates to the backs of t paintings. I have made four paintings of these strange scenes, containin several hundred figures, representing the transactions of each day; and if live to get them home, they will be found to be exceedingly curious and interesting.

I shudder at the relation, or even at the thought of these barbarous and 000

000 cruel scenes, and am almost ready to shrink from the task of reciting them after I have so long promised some account of them. I entered the *medicine-house* of these scenes, as I would have entered a church, and expected to see something extraordinary and strange, but yet in the form of worship or devotion; but alas! little did I expect to see the interior of their holy temple turned into a *slaughter-house*, and its floor strewed with the blood of its fanatic devotees. Little did I think that I was entering a house of God, where His blinded worshippers were to pollute its sacred interior with their blood, and propitiatory suffering and tortures—surpassing, if possible, the cruelty of the rack or the inquisition; but such the scene has been, and as such I will endeavour to describe it.

The "*Mandan religious ceremony*" then, as I believe it is very justly denominated, is an annual transaction, held in their *medicine-lodge* once a year, as a great religious anniversary, and for several distinct objects, as I shall in a few minutes describe; during and after which, they look with implicit reliance for the justification and approval of the Great Spirit.

771 All of the Indian tribes, as I have before observed, are religious—are worshipful—and many of them go to almost incredible lengths (as will be seen in the present instance, and many others I may recite) in worshipping the Great Spirit; denying and humbling themselves before Him for the same purpose, and in the same hope as we do, perhaps in a more rational and acceptable way.

The tribes, so far as I have visited them, all distinctly believe in the existence of a Great (or Good) Spirit, an Evil (or Bad) Spirit, and also in a future existence and future accountability, according to their virtues and vices in this world. So far the North American Indians would seem to be one family, and such an unbroken theory amongst them; yet with regard to the manner and form, and time and place of that accountability—to the constructions of virtues and vices, and the modes of appeasing and propitiating the Good and Evil Spirits, they are found with all the changes and variety which fortuitous circumstances, and fictions, and fables have wrought upon them.

If from their superstitions and their ignorance, there are oftentimes obscurities and mysteries thrown over and around their system, yet these affect not the theory itself, which is everywhere essentially the same—and which, if it be not correct, has this much to command the admiration of the enlightened world, that they worship with great sincerity, and all according to one creed.

The Mandans believe in the existence of a Great (or Good) Spirit, and also of an Evil Spirit, who they say existed long before the Good Spirit, and is far superior in power. They all believe also in a future state of existence, and a future administration of rewards and punishments, and (so do all other tribes that I have yet visited) they believe those punishments are not eternal, but commensurate with their sins.

These people living in a climate where they suffer from cold in the severity of their winters, have very naturally reversed our ideas of Heaven and Hell. The latter they describe to be a country very far to the north, of barren and hideous aspect, and covered with eternal snows and ice. The torments of this freezing place they describe as most excruciating; whilst Heaven they suppose to be in a warmer and delightful latitude, where nothing is felt but the keenest enjoyment, and where the country abounds in buffaloes and other luxuries of life. The Great or Good Spirit they believe dwells in the former place for the purpose of there meeting those who have offended him; increasing the agony of their sufferings, by being himself present, administering the penalties. The Bad or Evil Spirit they at the same time suppose to reside in Paradise, still tempting the happy; and those who have gone to the regions of punishment they believe to be tortured for a time proportioned to the amount of their transgressions, and that they are then to be transferred to the land of the happy, where they are again liable to the temptations of the Evil Spirit, and answerable again at a future period for their new offences. 771

Such is the religious creed of the Mandans, and for the purpose of appeasing the Good and Evil Spirits, and to secure their entrance into those "fields Elysian," or beautiful hunting grounds, do the young men subject themselves to the horrid and sickening cruelties to be described in the following pages.

There are other three distinct objects (yet to be named) for which these religious ceremonies are held, which are as follow:— 796

First, they are held annually as a celebration of the event of the subsiding of the Flood, which they call *Mee-nee-ro-ka-ha-sha*, (sinking down or settling of the waters.)

Secondly, for the purpose of dancing what they call, *Bel-lohck-na-pic* (the bull-dance); to the strict observance of which they attribute the coming of buffaloes to supply them with food during the season; and

Thirdly and lastly, for the purpose of conducting all the young men of the tribe, as they annually arrive to the age of manhood, through an ordeal of privation and torture, which, while it is supposed to harden their muscles and prepare them for extreme endurance, enables the chiefs who are spectators to the scene, to decide upon their comparative bodily strength and ability to endure the extreme privations and sufferings that often fall to the lots of Indian warriors; and that they may decide who is the most hardy and best able to lead a war-party in case of extreme exigency. 796 881

This part of the ceremony, as I have just witnessed it, is truly shocking to behold, and will almost stagger the belief of the world when they read o it. The scene is too terrible and too revolting to be seen or to be told, were it not an essential part of a whole, which will be new to the civilized world, and therefore worth their knowing. 000

The bull-dance, and many other parts of these ceremonies are exceed-

000 ingly grotesque and amusing, and that part of them which has a relation to
the Deluge is harmless and full of interest.

In the centre of the Mandan village is an open, circular area of 150 feet
361 diameter, kept always clear, as a public ground, for the display of all their
public feasts, parades, &c. and around it are their wigwams placed as near
to each other as they can well stand, their doors facing the centre of this
public area.

778 In the middle of this ground, which is trodden like a hard pavement, is a
curb (somewhat like a large hogshead standing on its end) made of planks
796 (and bound with hoops), some eight or nine feet high, which they religiously
preserve and protect from year to year, free from mark or scratch, and
which they call the "big canoe"—it is undoubtedly a symbolic representation of a part of their traditional history of the Flood; which it is very evident,
from this and numerous other features of this grand ceremony, they have in
some way or other received, and are here endeavouring to perpetuate by
vividly impressing it on the minds of the whole nation. This object of
superstition, from its position, as the very centre of the village is the rallying
point of the whole nation. To it their devotions are paid on various occasions
of feasts and religious exercises during the year; and in this extraordinary
scene it was often the nucleus of their mysteries and cruelties, as I shall
shortly describe them, and becomes an object worth bearing in mind, and
worthy of being understood.

796 This exciting and appalling scene, then, which is familiarly (and no doubt
correctly) called the "Mandan religious ceremony," commences, not on a
805 particular day of the year, (for these people keep no record of days or weeks),
773 but at a particular season, which is designated by the full expansion of the
willow leaves under the bank of the river; for according to their tradition,
"the twig that the bird brought home was a willow bough, and had full-grown leaves on it," and the bird to which they allude, is the mourning or turtle-dove, which they took great pains to point out to me, as it is often to be
seen feeding on the sides of their earth-covered lodges, and which, being, as
they call it, a *medicine-bird*, is not to be destroyed or harmed by any one,
and even their dogs are instructed not to do it injury.

On the morning on which this strange transaction commenced, I was sitting
796 at breakfast in the house of the Trader, Mr. Kipp, when at sun-rise, we were
suddenly startled by the shrieking and screaming of the women, and barking and howling of dogs, as if an enemy were actually storming their village.

"Now we have it!" (exclaimed *mine host*, as he sprang from the table,) the grand ceremony has commenced!—drop your knife and fork, Monsr. and get your sketch-book as soon as possible, that you may lose nothing, for the very moment of *commencing* is as curious as anything else of this strange affair." I seized my sketch-book, and all hands of us were in an instant in front of the medicine-lodge, ready to see and to hear all that was to take place. Groups of women and children were gathered on the tops of their earth-covered wigwams, and all were screaming, and dogs were howling, and all eyes directed to the prairies in the West, where was beheld at a mile distant, a solitary individual descending a prairie bluff, and making his way in a direct line towards the village!

The whole community joined in the general expression of great alarm, as if they were in danger of instant destruction; bows were strung and thrumed to test their elasticity—their horses were caught upon the prairie and run into the village—warriors were blackening their faces, and dogs were muzzled, and every preparation made, as if for instant combat

During this deafening din and confusion within the piquets of the village of the Mandans, the figure discovered on the prairie continued to approach with a dignified step and in a right line towards the village; all eyes were upon him, and he at length made his appearance (without opposition) within the piquets, and proceeded towards the centre of the village, where all the chiefs and braves stood ready to receive him, which they did in a cordial manner, by shaking hands with him, recognizing him as an old acquaintance, and pronouncing his name *Nu-mohk-muck-a-nah* (the first or only man). The body of this strange personage, which was chiefly naked, was painted with white clay, so as to resemble at a little distance, a white man; he wore a robe of four white wolf skins falling back over his shoulders; on his head he had a splendid head-dress made of two ravens' skins, and in his left hand he cautiously carried a large pipe, which he seemed to watch and guard as something of great importance. After passing the chiefs and braves as described, he approached the *medicine* or mystery lodge, which he had the means of opening, and which had been religiously closed during the year except for the performance of these religious rites.

Having opened and entered it, he called in four men whom he appointed to clean it out, and put it in readiness for the ceremonies, by sweeping it and strewing a profusion of green willow-boughs over its floor, and with them decorating its sides. Wild sage also, and many other aromatic herbs they gathered from the prairies, and scattered over its floor; and over these were arranged a curious group of buffalo and human skulls, and other articles, which were to be used during this strange and unaccountable transaction.

During the whole of this day, and while these preparations were making in the *medicine-lodge*, Nu-mohk-muck-a-nah (the first or only man) travelled through the village, stopping in front of every man's lodge, and crying until the owner of the lodge came out, and asked who he was, and what was the matter? to which he replied by relating the sad catastrophe which had happened on the earth's surface by the overflowing of the waters, saying that "he was the only person saved from the universal calamity: that he landed his big canoe on a high mountain in the west, where he now resides; that he had come to open the *medicine-lodge*, which must needs receive a present of some edged-tool from the owner of every wigwam, that

796 it may be sacrificed to the water; for he says, "if this is not done, there will be another flood, and no one will be saved, as it was with such tools that the big canoe was made."

Having visited every lodge or wigwam in the village, during the day, and having received such a present at each, as a hatchet, a knife, &c. (which is undoubtedly always prepared and ready for the occasion), he returned at evening and deposited them in the *medicine-lodge*, where they remained until the afternoon of the last day of the ceremony, when, as the final or closing scene, they were thrown into the river in a deep place, from a bank thirty feet high, and in presence of the whole village; from whence they can never be recovered, and where they were, undoubtedly, *sacrificed* to the Spirit of the Water.

796 881 During the first night of this strange character in the village, no one could tell where he slept; and every person, both old and young, and dogs, and all living things were kept within doors, and dead silence reigned every where. On the next morning at sunrise, however, he made his appearance again, and entered the *medicine-lodge;* and at his heels (in "*Indian file,*" *i. e.* single file, one following in another's tracks) all the young men who were candidates for the self-tortures which were to be inflicted, and for the honours that were to be bestowed by the chiefs on those who could most manfully endure them. There were on this occasion about fifty young men who entered the lists, and as they went into the sacred lodge, each one's body was chiefly naked, and covered with clay of different colours; some were red, others were yellow, and some were covered with white clay, giving them the appearance of white men. Each one of them carried in his right hand his *medicine-bag*—on his left arm, his shield of the bull's hide—in his left hand, his bow and arrows, with his quiver slung on his back.

When all had entered the lodge, they placed themselves in reclining postures around its sides, and each one had suspended over his head his respective weapons and *medicine*, presenting altogether, one of the most wild and picturesque scenes imaginable.

Nu-mohk-muck-a-nah (the first or only man) was in the midst of them, and having lit and smoked his medicine-pipe for their success; and having addressed them in a short speech, stimulating and encouraging them to trust to the Great Spirit for His protection during the severe ordeal they were about to pass through; he called into the lodge an old medicine or mystery-man, whose body was painted yellow, and whom he appointed master of ceremonies during this occasion, whom they denominated in their language *O-kee-pah Ka-se-kah* (keeper or conductor of the ceremonies). He was appointed, and the authority passed by the presentation of the medicine-pipe, on which they consider hangs all the power of holding and conducting all these rites.

After this delegated authority had thus passed over to the medicine-man; Nu-mohk-muck-a-nah shook hands with him, and bade him good

796
881
bye, saying "that he was going back to the mountains in the west, from whence he should assuredly return in just a year from that time, to open the lodge again." He then went out of the lodge, and passing through the village, took formal leave of the chiefs in the same manner, and soon disappeared over the bluffs from whence he came. No more was seen of this surprising character during the occasion; but I shall have something yet to say of him and his strange office before I get through the Letter.

To return to the lodge,—the medicine or mystery-man just appointed, and who had received his injunctions from Nu-mohk-muck-a-nah, was left sole conductor and keeper; and according to those injunctions, it was his duty to lie by a small fire in the centre of the lodge, with his medicine-pipe in his hand, crying to the Great Spirit incessantly, watching the young men, and preventing entirely their escape from the lodge, and all communication whatever with people outside, for the space of four days and nights, during which time they were not allowed to *eat*, to *drink*, or to *sleep*, preparatory to the excruciating self-tortures which they were to endure on the fourth day.

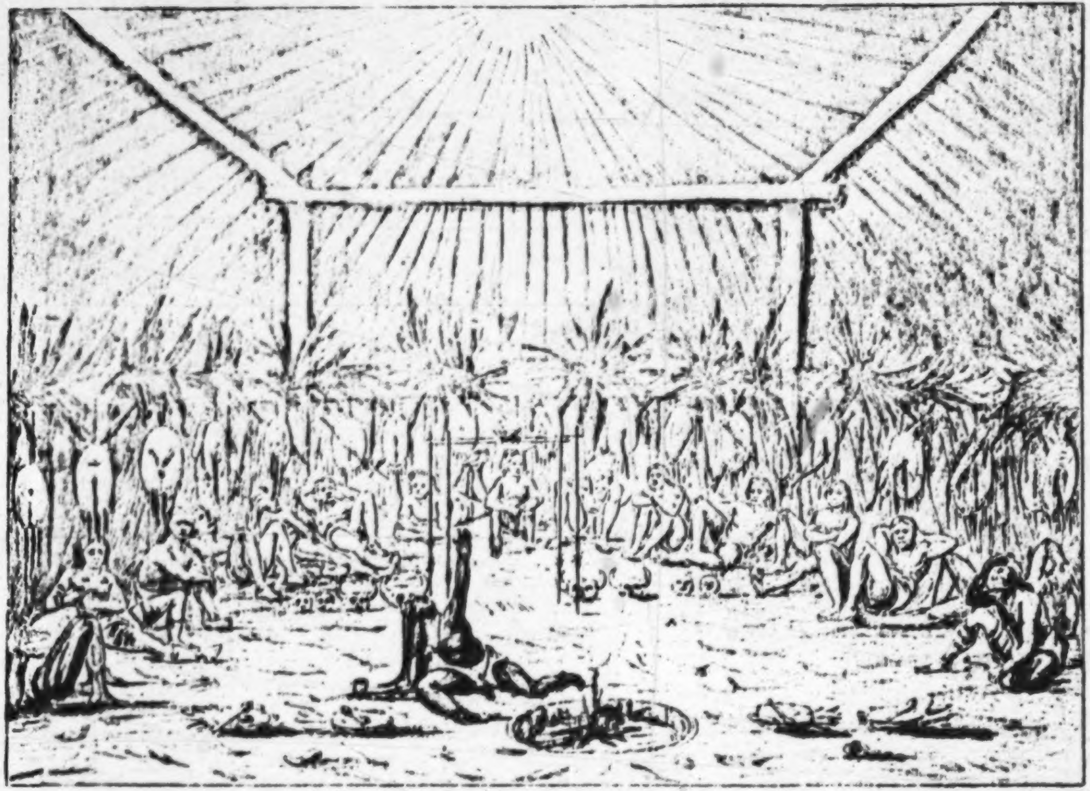
796
123
I mentioned that I had made four paintings of these strange scenes, and the first one exhibits the interior of the medicine-lodge at this moment; with the young men all reclining around its sides, and the conductor or mystery-man lying by the fire, crying to the Great Spirit (PLATE 66). It was just at this juncture that I was ushered into this sacred temple of their worship, with my companions, which was, undoubtedly, the first time that their devotions had ever been trespassed upon by the presence of pale faces; and in this instance had been brought about in the following strange and unexpected manner.

I had most luckily for myself, painted a full-length portrait of this great magician or high-priest, but a day previous to the commencement of the ceremonies (in which I had represented him in the performance of some of his mysteries), with which he had been so exceedingly pleased as well as astonished (as "he could see its eyes move"), that I must needs be, in his opinion, deeply skilled in magic and mysteries, and well-entitled to a respectable rank in the craft, to which I had been at once elevated by the unanimous voice of the doctors, and regularly initiated, and styled *Te-ho-pee-nee-wash-ee-waska-pooska*, the *white medicine* (or Spirit) *painter*.

With this very honourable degree which had just been conferred upon me, I was standing in front of the medicine-lodge early in the morning, with my companions by my side, endeavouring to get a peep, if possible, into its sacred interior; when this *master of ceremonies*, guarding and conducting its secrets, as I before described, came out of the door and taking me with a firm *professional* affection by the arm, led me into this *sanctum sanctorum*, which was strictly guarded from, even a peep or a gaze from the vulgar, by a vestibule of eight or ten feet in length, guarded with a double screen or door, and two or three dark and frowning centinels with spears

7: Catlin R, E-5 (1832-1840) 1857
NQI7 Mandan NQI7

796



[facing p. 161

796 123 or war-clubs in their hands. I gave the wink to my companions as I was passing in, and the potency of my *medicine* was such as to gain them a quiet admission, and all of us were comfortably placed on elevated seats, which our conductor soon prepared for us.

We were then in full view of everything that transpired in the lodge, having before us the scene exactly, which is represented in the first of the four pictures. To this seat we returned every morning at sunrise, and remained until sun-down for four days, the whole time which these strange scenes occupied.

796 778 In addition to the preparations and arrangements of the interior of this sanctuary, as above described, there was a curious, though a very strict arrangement of buffalo and human skulls placed on the floor of the lodge, and between them (which were divided into two parcels), and in front of the reclining group of young candidates, was a small and very delicate scaffold, elevated about five feet from the ground, made of four posts or crotches, not larger than a gun-rod, and placed some four or five feet apart, supporting four equally delicate rods, resting in the crotches; thus forming the frame of the scaffold, which was completed by a number of still smaller and more delicate sticks, transversely resting upon them. On the centre of this little frame rested some small object, which I could not exactly understand from the distance of twenty or thirty feet which intervened between it and my eye. I started several times from my seat to approach it, but all eyes were instantly upon me, and every mouth in the assembly sent forth a hush—sh—! which brought me back to my seat again; and I at length quieted my stifled curiosity as well as I could, upon learning the fact, that so sacred was that object, and so important its secrets or mysteries, that not *I* alone, but even the young men, who were passing the ordeal, and all the village, save the conductor of the mysteries, were stopped from approaching it, or knowing what it was.

This little mystery-thing, whatever it was, had the appearance from where I sat, of a small tortoise or frog lying on its back, with its head and legs quite extended, and wound and tasselled off with exceedingly delicate red and blue, and yellow ribbons or tassels, and other bright coloured ornaments; and seemed, from the devotions paid to it, to be the very nucleus of their mysteries—the *sanctissimus sanctorum*, from which seemed to emanate all the sanctity of their proceedings, and to which, all seemed to be paying the highest devotional respect.

This strange, yet important *essence* of their mysteries, I made every enquiry about; but got no further information of, than what I could learn by my eyes, at the distance at which I saw it, and from the silent respect which I saw paid to it. I tried with the doctors, and all of the *fraternity* answered me, that that was "*great medicine*," assuring me that it "could not be told." So I quieted my curiosity as well as I could, by the full conviction that I had a *degree* or two yet to take before I could fathom all

the arcana of Indian superstitions; and that this little, seemingly wonderful, 796
relic of antiquity, symbol of some grand event, or "secret too valuable to 778
be told," might have been at last nothing but a silly bunch of strings and toys, to which they pay some great peculiar regard; giving thereby to some favourite Spirit or essence an ideal existence, and which, when called upon to describe, they refuse to do so, calling it "*Great Medicine*," for the very reason that there is nothing in it to reveal or describe.

Immediately under the little frame or scaffold described, and on the floor of the lodge was placed a knife, and by the side of it a bundle of splints or skewers, which were kept in readiness for the infliction of the cruelties directly to be explained. There were seen also, in this stage of the affair, a number of cords of rawhide hanging down from the top of the lodge, and passing through its roof, with which the young men were to be suspended by the splints passed through their flesh, and drawn up by men placed on the top of the lodge for the purpose, as will be described in a few moments.

There were also four articles of great veneration and importance lying on the floor of the lodge, which were sacks, containing in each some three or four gallons of water. These also were objects of superstitious regard, and made with great labour and much ingenuity; each one of them being constructed of the skin of the buffalo's neck, and most elaborately sewed together in the form of a large tortoise lying on its back, with a bunch of eagle's quills appended to it as a tail; and each of them having a stick, shaped like a drum-stick, lying on them, with which, in a subsequent stage of these ceremonies, as will be seen, they are beaten upon by several of their mystery-men, as a part of the music for their strange dances and mysteries. By the side of these sacks which they call *Eeh-teeh-ka*, are two other articles of equal importance, which they call *Eeh-na-dee* (rattles), in the form of a gourd-shell made also of dried skins, and used at the same time as the others, in the music (or rather *noise* and *din*) for their dances, &c.

These four sacks of water have the appearance of very great antiquity; and by enquiring of my very ingenious friend and patron, the *medicine-man*, after the ceremonies were over, he very gravely told me, that "those four tortoises contained the waters from the four quarters of the world—that these waters had been contained therein ever since the settling down of the waters!" I did not think it best to advance any argument against so ridiculous a theory, and therefore could not even enquire or learn, at what period they had been instituted, or how often, or on what occasions, the water in them had been changed or replenished.

I made several propositions, through my friend Mr. Kipp, the trader and 796
interpreter, to purchase one of these strange things by offering them a very 421
liberal price; to which I received in answer that these, and all the very numerous articles used in these ceremonies, being a *society property* were

796 *medicine*, and could not be sold for any consideration; so I abandoned all
thoughts of obtaining anything, except what I have done by the *medicine*
421 operation of my pencil, which was applied to everything, and even upon
that they looked with decided distrust and apprehension, as a sort of theft
or sacrilege.

Such then was the group, and such the appearance of the interior of the
796 medicine-lodge during the three first, and part of the fourth day also, of the
Mandan religious ceremonies. The medicine-man with a group about him, of young aspirants who were under his sole controul, as was every article and implement to be used, and the sanctity of this solitary and gloomy looking place, which could not be trespassed upon by any man's presence without his most sovereign permission.

During the three first days of this solemn conclave, there were many very
796 curious forms and amusements enacted in the open area in the middle of the
535 village, and in front of the medicine-lodge, by other members of the community, one of which formed a material part or link of these strange ceremonials. This very curious and exceedingly grotesque part of their performance, which they denominated *Bel-lohck nah-pick* (the bull-dance) of which I have before spoken, as one of the avowed objects for which they held this annual fête; and to the strictest observance of which they attribute the coming of buffaloes to supply them with food during the season—is repeated four times during the first day, eight times on the second day, twelve times on the third day, and sixteen times on the fourth day; and always around the curb, or "*big canoe*," of which I have before spoken.

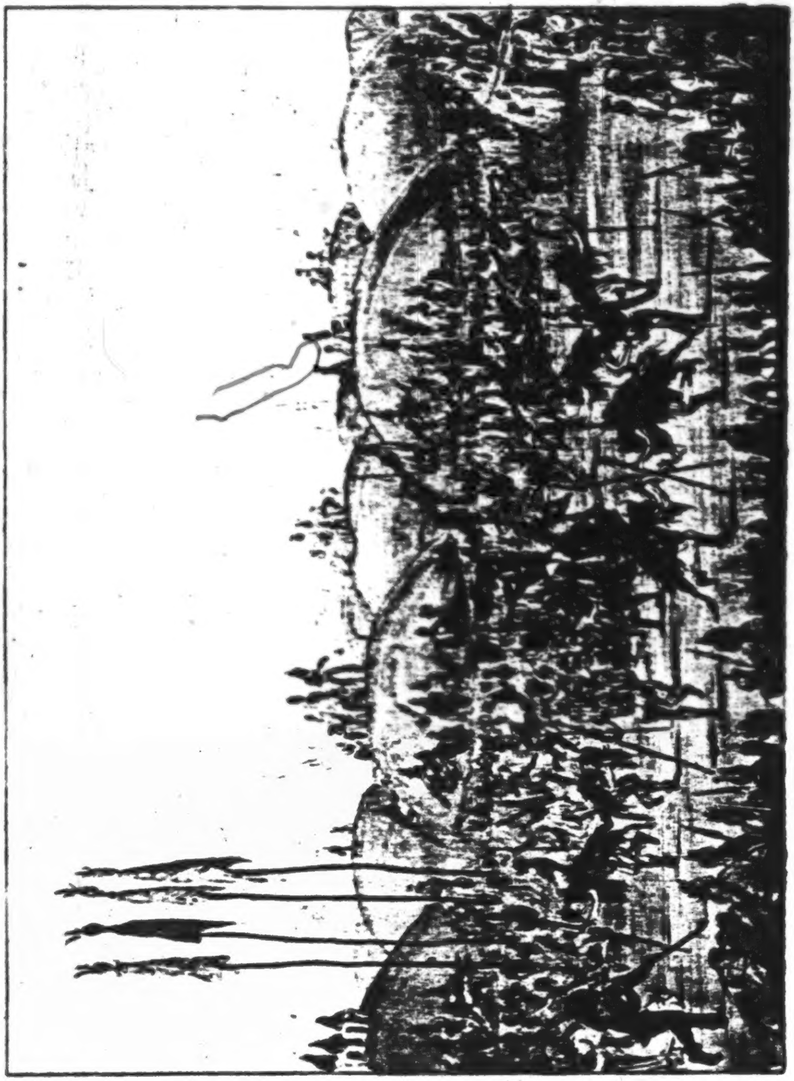
This subject I have selected for my second picture, and the principal actors in it were eight men, with the entire skins of buffaloes thrown over their backs, with the horns and hoofs and tails remaining on; their bodies in a horizontal position, enabling them to imitate the actions of the buffalo, whilst they were looking out of its eyes as through a mask (PLATE 67).

The bodies of these men were chiefly naked and all painted in the most extraordinary manner, with the nicest adherence to exact similarity; their limbs, bodies and faces, being in every part covered, either with black, red, or white paint. Each one of these strange characters had also a lock of buffalo's hair tied around his ancles—in his right hand a rattle, and a slender white rod or staff, six feet long, in the other; and carried on his back, a bunch of green willow boughs about the usual size of a bundle of straw. These eight men, being divided into four pairs, took their positions on the four different sides of the curb or big canoe, representing thereby the four cardinal points; and between each group of them, with the back turned to the big canoe, was another figure, engaged in the same dance, keeping step with them, with a similar staff or wand in one hand and a rattle in the other, and (being four in number) answering again to the four cardinal points. The bodies of these four young men were chiefly naked, with no other dress upon them than a beautiful kelt (or quartz-quaw), around the waist, made of eagles

7: Catlin R, E-5 (1832-1840) 1857
NQ17 Mandan NQ17

44

796
535



67

[Facing p. 164]

716
535

quills and ermine, and very splendid head-dresses made of the same materials. Two of these figures were painted entirely black with pounded charcoal and grease, whom they called the "firmament or night," and the numerous white spots which were dotted all over their bodies, they called "stars." The other two were painted from head to foot as red as vermilion could make them; these they said represented the day, and the white streaks which were painted up and down over their bodies, were "ghosts which the morning rays were chasing away."

These twelve are the only persons actually engaged in this strange dance, which is each time repeated in the same form, without the slightest variation. There are, however, a great number of characters engaged in giving the whole effect and wildness to this strange and laughable scene, each one acting well his part, and whose offices, strange and inexplicable as they are, I will endeavour to point out and explain as well as I can, from what I saw, elucidated by their own descriptions.

This most remarkable scene, then, which is witnessed more or less often on each day, takes place in presence of the whole nation, who are generally gathered around, on the tops of the wigwams or otherwise, as spectators, whilst the young men are reclining and fasting in the lodge as above described. On the first day, this "*bull-dance*" is given *once* to each of the cardinal points, and the medicine-man smokes his pipe in those directions. On the second day, *twice* to each; *three times* to each on the third day, and *four times* to each on the fourth. As a signal for the dancers and other characters (as well as the public) to assemble, the old man, master of ceremonies, with the medicine-pipe in hand, dances out of the lodge, singing (or rather crying) forth a most pitiful lament, until he approaches the big canoe, against which he leans, with the pipe in his hand, and continues to cry. At this instant, four very aged and patriarchal looking men, whose bodies are painted red, and who have been guarding the four sides of the lodge, enter it and bring out the four sacks of water, which they place near the big canoe, where they seat themselves by the side of them and commence thumping on them with the mallets or drumsticks which have been lying on them; and another brandishes and shakes the *eeh-na-dees* or rattles, and all unite to them their voices, raised to the highest pitch possible, as the music for the *bull-dance*, which is then commenced and continued for fifteen minutes or more in perfect time, and without cessation or intermission. When the music and dancing stop, which are always perfectly simultaneous, the whole nation raise the huzza! and a deafening shout of approbation; the master of ceremonies dances back to the medicine-lodge, and the old men return to their former place; the sacks of water, and all rest as before, until by the same method, they are again called into a similar action.

The supernumeraries or other characters who play their parts in this grand spectacle, are numerous and well worth description. By the side of the

796 big canoe are seen two men with the skins of grizzly bears thrown over them, using the skins as a mask, over their heads. These ravenous animals 535 are continually growling and threatening to devour everything before them and interfering with the forms of their religious ceremony. To appease them, the women are continually bringing and placing before them dishes of meat, which are as often snatched up and carried to the prairie, by two men whose bodies are painted black and their heads white, whom they call bald eagles, who are darting by them and grasping their food from before them as they pass. These are again chased upon the plains by a hundred or more small boys, who are naked, with their bodies painted yellow and their heads white, whom they call *Cabris* or antelopes; who at length get the food away from them and devour it; thereby inculcating (perhaps) the beautiful moral, that by the dispensations of Providence, his bountiful gifts will fall at last to the hands of the innocent.

During the intervals between these dances, all these characters, except those from the medicine-lodge, retire to a wigwam close by, which they use on the occasion also as a sacred place, being occupied exclusively by them while they are at rest, and also for the purpose of painting and ornamenting their bodies for the occasion.

During each and every one of these dances, the old men who beat upon the sacks and sing, are earnestly chanting forth their supplications to the Great Spirit, for the continuation of his influence in sending them buffaloes to supply them with food during the year; they are administering courage and fortitude to the young men in the lodge, by telling them, that "the Great Spirit has opened his ears in their behalf—that the very atmosphere all about them is peace—that their women and children can hold the mouth of the grizzly bear—that they have invoked from day to day O-ke-hee-de (the Evil Spirit)—that they are still challenging him to come, and yet he has not dared to make his appearance!"

796 But alas! in the last of these dances, on the fourth day, in the midst of all their mirth and joy, and about noon, and in the height of all these exultations, an instant scream burst forth from the tops of the lodges!—men, women, dogs and all, seemed actually to howl and shudder with alarm, as they fixed their glaring eye-balls upon the prairie bluff, about a mile in the west, down the side of which a man was seen descending at full speed towards the village! This strange character darted about in a zig-zag course in all directions on the prairie, like a boy in pursuit of a butterfly, until he approached the piquets of the village, when it was discovered that his body was entirely naked, and painted as black as a negro, with pounded charcoal and bear's grease; his body was therefore everywhere of a shining black, except occasionally white rings of an inch or more in diameter, which were marked here and there all over him; and frightful indentures of white around his mouth, resembling canine teeth. Added to his hideous appearance, he gave the most frightful shrieks and screams as he dashed through the village

and entered the terrified group, which was composed (in that quarter) chiefly of females, who had assembled to witness the amusements which were transpiring around the "big canoe."

This unearthly looking creature carried in his two hands a wand or staff of eight or nine feet in length, with a red ball at the end of it, which he continually slid on the ground a-head of him as he ran. All eyes in the village, save those of the persons engaged in the dance, were centred upon him, and he made a desperate rush towards the women, who screamed for protection as they were endeavouring to retreat; and falling in groups upon each other as they were struggling to get out of his reach. In this moment of general terror and alarm there was an instant check! and all for a few moments were as silent as death.

The old master of ceremonies, who had run from his position at the big canoe, had met this monster of fiends, and having thrust the *medicine-pipe* before him, held him still and immoveable under its charm! This check gave the females an opportunity to get out of his reach, and when they were free from their danger, though all hearts beat yet with the instant excitement, their alarm soon cooled down into the most exorbitant laughter and shouts of applause at his sudden defeat, and the awkward and ridiculous posture in which he was stopped and held. The old man was braced stiff by his side, with his eye-balls glaring him in the face, whilst the medicine-pipe held in its mystic chains his *Satanic* Majesty, annulling all the powers of his magical wand, and also depriving him of the powers of locomotion! Surely no two human beings ever presented a more striking group than these two individuals did for a few moments, with their eye-balls set in direst mutual hatred upon each other; both struggling for the supremacy, relying on the potency of their medicine or mystery. The one held in check, with his body painted black, representing (or rather assuming to be) his sable majesty, O-kee-hee-de (the Evil Spirit), frowning everlasting vengeance on the other, who sternly gazed him back with a look of exultation and contempt, as he held him in check and disarmed under the charm of his sacred mystery-pipe.

When the superior powers of the medicine-pipe (on which hang all these annual mysteries) had been thus fully tested and acknowledged, and the women had had requisite time to withdraw from the reach of this fiendish monster, the pipe was very gradually withdrawn from before him, and he seemed delighted to recover the use of his limbs again, and power of changing his position from the exceedingly unpleasant and really ridiculous one he appeared in, and was compelled to maintain, a few moments before; rendered more superlatively ridiculous and laughable, from the further information, which I am constrained to give, of the plight in which this demon of terror and vulgarity made his *entrée* into the midst of the Mandan village, and to the centre and nucleus of their first and greatest religious ceremony.

796 Then, to proceed: I said that this strange personage's body was naked—was painted jet black with charcoal and bear's grease, with a wand in his hands of eight feet in length with a red ball at the end of it, which he was rubbing about on the ground in front of him as he ran. In addition to this he had—*ung gee ah waheea notch,t oheks tcha, ung gee an ung hutch tow a tow ah ches menny. Ung gee ah to to wun nee, ahkst to wan ee eigh' s ta w.*

In this plight, in which I have not dared fully to represent him in the picture, he pursued the groups of females, spreading dismay and alarm wherever he went, and consequently producing the awkward and exceedingly laughable predicament in which he was placed by the sudden check from the medicine-pipe, as I have above stated, when all eyes were intently fixed upon him, and all joined in rounds of applause for the success of the magic spell that was placed upon him; all voices were raised in shouts of satisfaction at his defeat, and all eyes gazed upon him; of chiefs and of warriors—matrons and even of their tender-aged and timid daughters, whose education had taught them to receive the *moral* of these scenes without the shock of impropriety, that would have startled a more fastidious and consequently sensual-thinking people.

After repeated attempts thus made, and thus defeated in several parts of the crowd, this blackened monster was retreating over the ground where the buffalo-dance was going on, and having (apparently, par accident) swaggered against one of the men placed under the skin of a buffalo and engaged in the "bull dance," he started back, and placing himself in the attitude of a buffalo,—*hi ung ee a wahkstia, chee a nahk s tammee ung s towa; ee ung ee aht gwaht ee o nunghths tcha ho a, tummee oxt no ah, ughstono uh hi en en ah nahxt gwi aht gahtch gun ne. Gwee en on doatcht chee en aht gunne how how en ahxst tchu!*

After this he paid his visits to three others of the eight, in succession, receiving as before the deafening shouts of approbation which pealed from every mouth in the multitude, who were all praying to the Great Spirit to send them buffaloes to supply them with food during the season, and who attribute the coming of buffaloes for this purpose entirely to the strict and critical observance of this ridiculous and disgusting part of the ceremonies.

During the half hour or so that he had been jostled about amongst man and beasts, to the great amusement and satisfaction of the lookers-on, he seemed to have become exceedingly exhausted, and anxiously looking out for some feasible mode of escape.

In this awkward predicament he became the laughing-stock and butt for the women, who being no longer afraid of him, were gathering in groups around, to tease and tantalize him; and in the midst of this dilemma, which soon became a very sad one—one of the women, who stole up behind him with both hands full of yellow dirt—dashed it into his face and eyes, and all

796 over him, and his body being covered with grease, took instantly a different hue. He seemed heart-broken at this signal disgrace, and commenced crying most vehemently, when, *a l'instant*, another caught his *wand* from his hand, and broke it across her knee. It was snatched for by others, who broke it still into bits, and then threw them at him. His power was now gone—his bodily strength was exhausted, and he made a bolt for the prairie—he dashed through the crowd, and made his way through the piquets on the back part of the village, where were placed for the purpose, an hundred or more women and girls, who escorted him as he ran on the prairie for half a mile or more, beating him with sticks, and stones, and dirt, and kicks, and cuffs, until he was at length seen escaping from their clutches, and making the best of his retreat over the prairie bluffs, from whence he first appeared.

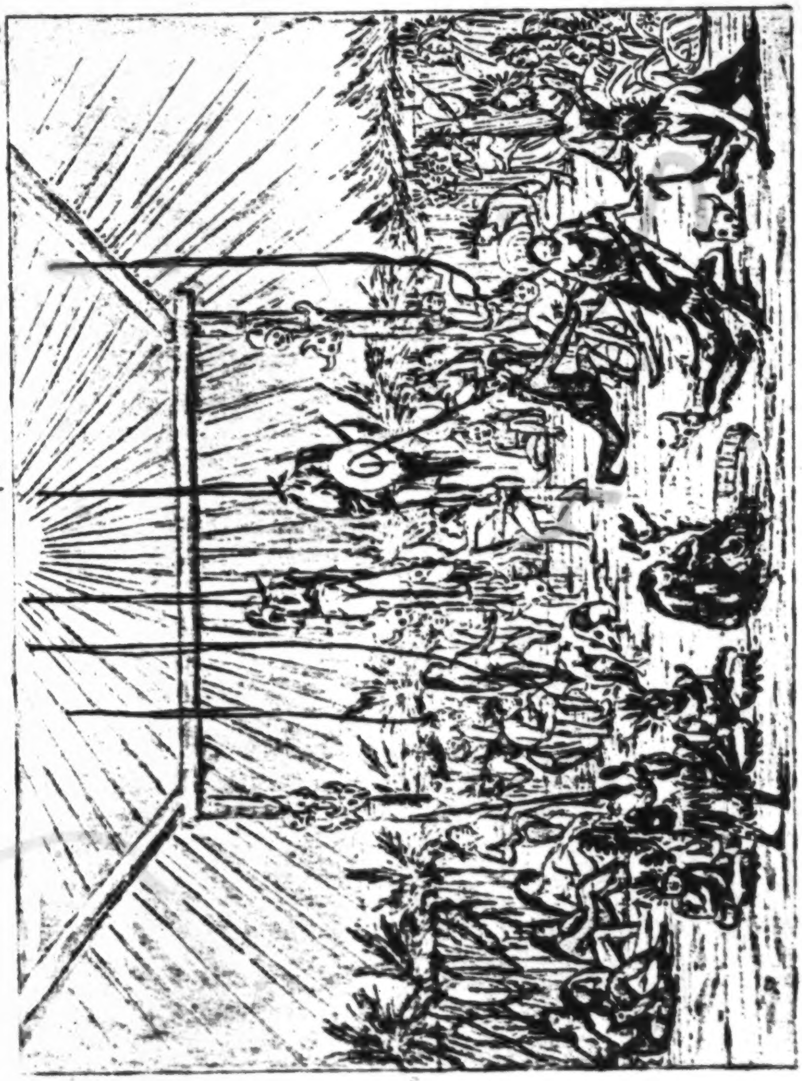
At the moment of this signal victory, and when all eyes lost sight of him as he disappeared over the bluffs, the whole village united their voices in shouts of satisfaction. The bull-dance then stopped, and preparations were instantly made for the commencement of the cruelties which were to take place within the lodge, leaving us to draw, from what had just transpired, the following beautiful moral :—

That in the midst of their religious ceremonies, the Evil Spirit (O-kee-hee-de) made his entrée for the purpose of doing mischief, and of disturbing their worship—that he was held in check, and defeated by the superior influence and virtue of the *medicine-pipe*, and at last, driven in disgrace out of the village, by the very part of the community whom he came to abuse.

796 881 At the close of this exciting scene, preparations were made, as above stated, by the return of the master of ceremonies and musicians to the medicine-lodge, where also were admitted at the same time a number of men, who were to be instruments of the cruelties to be inflicted; and also the chief and doctors of the tribe, who were to look on, and bear witness to, and decide upon, the comparative degree of fortitude, with which the young men sustain themselves in this most extreme and excruciating ordeal. The chiefs having seated themselves on one side of the lodge, dressed out in their robes and splendid head-dresses—the band of music seated and arranged themselves in another part; and the old master of ceremonies having placed himself in front of a small fire in the centre of the lodge, with his "big pipe" in his hands, and having commenced smoking to the Great Spirit, with all possible vehemence for the success of these aspirants, presented the subject for the third picture, which they call "*pohk-hong*," the cutting scene (PLATE 68). Around the sides of the lodge are seen, still reclining, as I have before mentioned, a part of the group, whilst others of them have passed the ordeal of self-tortures, and have been removed out of the lodge; and others still are seen in the very act of submitting to them, which were inflicted in the following manner:—After having removed the *sanctissimus sanctorum*, or little scaffold, of which I before spoke, and having

7: Catlin R, E-5 (1832-1840) 1857
NQ17 Mandan NQ17

796
785



[facing p. 169]

\

796 881 removed also the buffalo and human skulls from the floor, and attached them to the posts of the lodge; and two men having taken their positions near the middle of the lodge, for the purpose of inflicting the tortures—the one with the scalping-knife, and the other with the bunch of splints (which I have before mentioned) in his hand; one at a time of the young fellows, already emaciated with fasting, and thirsting, and waking, for nearly four days and nights, advanced from the side of the lodge, and placed himself on his hands and feet, or otherwise, as best suited for the performance of the operation, where he submitted to the cruelties in the following manner:—An inch or more of the flesh on each shoulder, or each breast was taken up between the thumb and finger by the man who held the knife in his right hand; and the knife, which had been ground sharp on both edges, and then hacked and notched with the blade of another, to make it produce as much pain as possible, was forced through the flesh below the fingers, and being withdrawn, was followed with a splint or skewer, from the other, who held a bunch of such in his left hand, and was ready to force them through the wound. There were then two cords lowered down from the top of the lodge (by men who were placed on the lodge outside, for the purpose), which were fastened to these splints or skewers, and they instantly began to haul him up; he was thus raised until his body was suspended from the ground where he rested, until the knife and a splint were passed through the flesh or integuments in a similar manner on each arm below the shoulder (over the *brachialis externus*), below the elbow (over the *extensor carpi radialis*), on the thighs (over the *vastus externus*), and below the knees (over the *peroneus*).

In some instances they remained in a reclining position on the ground until this painful operation was finished, which was performed, in all instances, exactly on the same parts of the body and limbs; and which, in its progress, occupied some five or six minutes.

Each one was then instantly raised with the cords, until the weight of his body was suspended by them, and then, while the blood was streaming down their limbs, the bystanders hung upon the splints each man's appropriate shield, bow and quiver, &c.; and in many instances, the skull of a buffalo with the horns on it, was attached to each lower arm and each lower leg, for the purpose, probably, of preventing by their great weight, the struggling, which might otherwise have taken place to their disadvantage whilst they were hung up.

When these things were all adjusted, each one was raised higher by the cords, until these weights all swung clear from the ground, leaving his feet, in most cases, some six or eight feet above the ground. In this plight they at once became appalling and frightful to look at—the flesh, to support the weight of their bodies, with the additional weights which were attached to them, was raised six or eight inches by the skewers; and their heads sunk forward on the breasts, or thrown backwards, in a much more frightful condition, according to the way in which they were hung up.

The unflinching fortitude, with which every one of them bore this part of 776
the torture surpassed credulity; each one as the knife was passed through his 881
flesh sustained an unchangeable countenance; and several of them, seeing me making sketches, beckoned me to look at their faces, which I watched through all this horrid operation, without being able to detect anything but the pleasantest smiles as they looked me in the eye, while I could hear the knife rip through the flesh, and feel enough of it myself, to start involuntary and uncontroullable tears over my cheeks.

When raised to the condition above described, and completely suspended by the cords, the sanguinary hands, through which he had just passed, turned back to perform a similar operation on another who was ready, and each one in his turn passed into the charge of others, who instantly introduced him to a new and improved stage of their refinements in cruelty.

Surrounded by imps and demons as they appear, a dozen or more, who seem to be concerting and devising means for his exquisite agony, gather around him, when one of the number advances towards him in a sneering manner, and commences turning him around with a pole which he brings in his hand for the purpose. This is done in a gentle manner at first; but gradually increased, when the brave fellow, whose proud spirit can controul its agony no longer, burst out in the most lamentable and heart-rending cries that the human voice is capable of producing, crying forth a prayer to the Great Spirit to support and protect him in this dreadful trial; and continually repeating his confidence in his protection. In this condition he is continued to be turned, faster and faster—and there is no hope of escape from it, nor chance for the slightest relief, until by fainting, his voice falters, and his struggling ceases, and he hangs, apparently, a still and lifeless corpse! When he is, by turning, gradually brought to this condition, which is generally done within ten or fifteen minutes, there is a close scrutiny passed upon him among his tormentors, who are checking and holding each other back as long as the least struggling or tremour can be discovered, lest he should be removed before he is (as they term it) "entirely dead."

When brought to this alarming and most frightful condition, and the turning has gradually ceased, as his voice and his strength have given out, leaving him to hang entirely still, and apparently lifeless; when his tongue is distended from his mouth, and his *medicine-bag*, which he has affectionately and superstitiously clung to with his left hand, has dropped to the ground; the signal is given to the men on top of the lodge, by gently striking the cord with the pole below, when they very gradually and carefully lower him to the ground.

In this helpless condition he lies, like a loathsome corpse to look at, though in the keeping (as they call it) of the Great Spirit, whom he trusts will protect him, and enable him to get up and walk away. As soon as he is lowered to the ground thus, one of the bystanders advances, and pulls out the two splints or pins from the breasts and shoulders, thereby disengaging

796 him from the cords by which he has been hung up; but leaving all the others with their weights, &c. hanging to his flesh.

881 In this condition he lies for six or eight minutes, until he gets strength to rise and move himself, for no one is allowed to assist or offer him aid, as he is here enjoying the most valued privilege which a Mandan can boast of, that of "trusting his life to the keeping of the Great Spirit," in this time of extreme peril.

796 As soon as he is seen to get strength enough to rise on his hands and
feet, and drag his body around the lodge, he crawls with the weights still
881 hanging to his body, to another part of the lodge, where there is another
304 Indian sitting with a hatchet in his hand, and a dried buffalo skull before him; and here, in the most earnest and humble manner, by holding up the little finger of his left hand to the Great Spirit, he expresses to Him, in a speech of a few words, his willingness to give it as a sacrifice; when he lays it on the dried buffalo skull, where the other chops it off near the hand, with a blow of the hatchet!

Nearly all of the young men whom I saw passing this horrid ordeal, gave in the above manner, the little finger of the left hand; and I saw also several, who immediately afterwards (and apparently with very little concern or emotion), with a similar speech, extended in the same way, the *fore*-finger of the same hand, and that too was struck off; leaving on the left hand only the two middle fingers and the thumb; all which they deem absolutely essential for holding the bow, the only weapon for the left hand.

One would think that this mutilation had thus been carried quite far enough; but I have since examined several of the head chiefs and dignitaries of the tribe, who have also given, in this manner, the little finger of the right hand, which is considered by them to be a much greater sacrifice than both of the others; and I have found also a number of their most famous men, who furnish me incontestible proof, by five or six corresponding scars on each arm, and each breast, and each leg, that they had so many times in their lives submitted to this almost incredible operation, which seems to be optional with them; and the oftener they volunteer to go through it, the more famous they become in the estimation of their tribe.

No bandages are applied to the fingers which have been amputated, nor any arteries taken up; nor is any attention whatever, paid to them or the other wounds; but they are left (as they say) "for the Great Spirit to cure, who will surely take good care of them." It is a remarkable fact (which I learned from a close inspection of their wounds from day to day) that the bleeding is but very slight and soon ceases, probably from the fact of their extreme exhaustion and debility, caused by want of sustenance and sleep, which checks the natural circulation, and admirably at the same time prepares them to meet the severity of these tortures without the same degree of sensibility and pain, which, under other circumstances, might result in inflammation and death.

796
881

During the whole of the time of this cruel part of these most extraordinary inflictions, the chiefs and dignitaries of the tribe are looking on, to decide who are the hardiest and "stoutest hearted"—who can hang the longest by his flesh before he faints, and who will be soonest up, after he has been down; that they may know whom to appoint to lead a war-party, or place at the most honourable and desperate post. The four old men are incessantly beating upon the sacks of water and singing the whole time, with their voices strained to the highest key, vaunting forth, for the encouragement of the young men, the power and efficacy of the *medicine-pipe*, which has disarmed the monster O-kee-hee-de (or Evil Spirit), and driven him from the village, and will be sure to protect them and watch over them through their present severe trial.

As soon as six or eight had passed the ordeal as above described, they were led out of the lodge, with their weights hanging to their flesh, and dragging on the ground, to undergo another, and a still more appalling mode of suffering in the centre of the village, and in presence of the whole nation, in the manner as follows:—

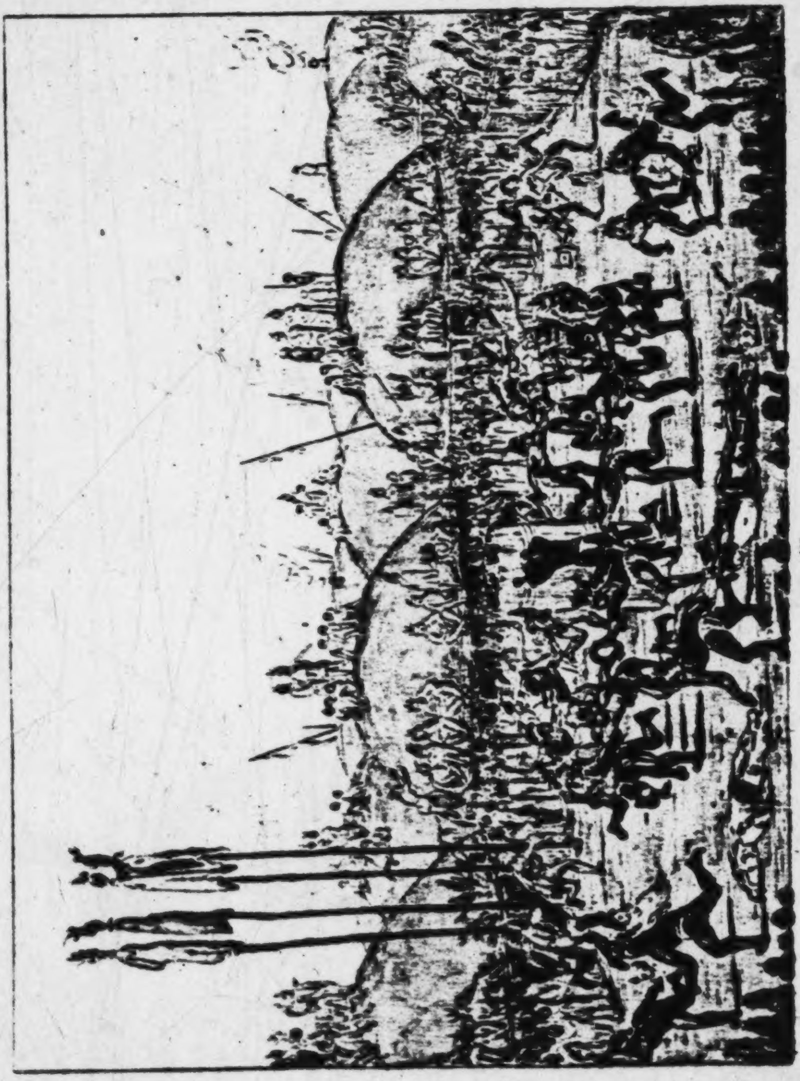
The signal for the commencement of this part of the cruelties was given by the old master of ceremonies, who again ran out as in the buffalo-dance, and leaning against the big canoe, with his *medicine-pipe* in his hand, began to cry. This was done several times in the afternoon, as often as there were six or eight who had passed the ordeal just described within the lodge, who were then taken out in the open area, in the presence of the whole village, with the buffalo skulls and other weights attached to their flesh, and dragging on the ground! There were then in readiness, and prepared for the purpose, about twenty young men, selected of equal height and equal age; with their bodies chiefly naked, with beautiful (and similar) head-dresses of war-eagles' quills, on their heads, and a wreath made of willow boughs held in the hands between them, connecting them in a chain or circle in which they ran around the *big canoe*, with all possible speed, raising their voices in screams and yelps to the highest pitch that was possible, and keeping the curb or big canoe in the centre, as their nucleus.

Then were led forward the young men who were further to suffer, and being placed at equal distances apart, and outside of the ring just described, each one was taken in charge of two athletic young men, fresh and strong, who stepped up to him, one on each side, and by wrapping a broad leather strap around his wrists, without tying it, grasped it firm underneath the hand, and stood prepared for what they call *Eh-ke-nah-ka-nah-pick* (the last race, PLATE 69). This, the spectator looking on would suppose was most correctly named, for he would think it was the last race they could possibly run in this world.

In this condition they stand, pale and ghastly, from abstinence and loss of blood, until all are prepared, and the word is given, when all start and run around, outside of the other ring; and each poor fellow, with his weights

7: Catlin R, E-5 (1832-1840) 1857
NQ17 Mandan NQ17

796



[facing p. 173]

796
881

dragging on the ground, and his furious conductors by his side, who hurry him forward by the wrists, struggles in the desperate emulation to run longer without "dying" (as they call it) than his comrades, who are fainting around him and sinking down, like himself, where their bodies are dragged with all possible speed, and often with their faces in the dirt. In the commencement of this dance or race they all start at a moderate pace, and their speed being gradually increased, the pain becomes so excruciating that their languid and exhausted frames give out, and they are dragged by their wrists until they are disengaged from the weights that were attached to their flesh, and this must be done by such violent force as to tear the flesh out with the splint, which (as they say) can never be pulled out endwise, without greatly offending the Great Spirit and defeating the object for which they have thus far suffered. The splints or skewers which are put through the breast and the shoulders, take up a part of the pectoral or trapezius muscle, which is necessary for the support of the great weight of their bodies, and which, as I have before mentioned, are withdrawn as soon as he is lowered down—but all the others, on the legs and arms, seem to be very ingeniously passed through the flesh and integuments without taking up the muscle, and even these, to be broken out, require so strong and so violent a force that most of the poor fellows fainted under the operation, and when they were freed from the last of the buffalo skulls and other weights, (which was often done by some of the bystanders throwing the weight of their bodies on to them as they were dragging on the ground) they were in every instance dropped by the persons who dragged them, and their bodies were left, appearing like nothing but a mangled and a loathsome corpse! At this strange and frightful juncture, the two men who had dragged them, fled through the crowd and away upon the prairie, as if they were guilty of some enormous crime, and were fleeing from summary vengeance.

Each poor fellow, having thus patiently and manfully endured the privations and tortures devised for him, and (in this last struggle with the most appalling effort) torn himself loose from them and his tormentors, he lies the second time, in the " keeping (as he terms it) of the Great Spirit," to whom he issues his repeated prayers, and entrusts his life: and in whom he reposes the most implicit confidence for his preservation and recovery. As an evidence of this, and of the high value which these youths set upon this privilege, there is no person, not a relation or a chief of the tribe, who is allowed, or who would dare, to step forward to offer an aiding hand, even to save his life; for not only the rigid customs of the nation, and the pride of the individual who has entrusted his life to the keeping of the Great Spirit, would sternly reject such a tender; but their superstition, which is the strongest of all arguments in an Indian community, would alone, hold all the tribe in fear and dread of interfering, when they consider they have so good a reason to believe that the Great Spirit has undertaken the special care and protection of his devoted worshippers.

796
881

In this "last race," which was the struggle that finally closed their sufferings, each one was dragged until he fainted, and was thus left, looking more like the dead than the living: and thus each one laid, until, by the aid of the Great Spirit, he was in a few minutes seen gradually rising, and at last reeling and staggering, like a drunken man, through the crowd (which made way for him) to his wigwam, where his friends and relatives stood ready to take him into hand and restore him.

In this frightful scene, as in the buffalo-dance, the whole nation was assembled as spectators, and all raised the most piercing and violent yells and screams they could possibly produce, to drown the cries of the suffering ones, that no heart could even be touched with sympathy for them. I have mentioned before, that six or eight of the young men were brought from the medicine-lodge at a time, and when they were thus passed through this shocking ordeal, the medicine-men and the chiefs returned to the interior, where as many more were soon prepared, and underwent a similar treatment; and after that another batch, and another, and so on, until the whole number, some forty-five or fifty had run in this sickening circle, and, by leaving their weights, had opened the flesh for honourable scars. I said *all*, but there was one poor fellow though (and I shudder to tell it), who was dragged around and around the circle, with the skull of an elk hanging to the flesh on one of his legs,—several had jumped upon it, but to no effect, for the splint was under the sinew, which could not be broken. The dragging became every instant more and more furious, and the apprehensions for the poor fellow's life, apparent by the piteous howl which was set up for him by the multitude around; and at last the medicine-man ran, with his medicine-pipe in his hand, and held them in check, when the body was dropped, and left upon the ground, with the skull yet hanging to it. The boy, who was an extremely interesting and fine-looking youth, soon recovered his senses and his strength, looking deliberately at his torn and bleeding limbs; and also with the most pleasant smile of defiance, upon the misfortune which had now fallen to his peculiar lot, crawled through the crowd (instead of walking, which they are never again at liberty to do until the flesh is torn out, and the article left) to the prairie, and over which, for the distance of half a mile, to a sequestered spot, without any attendant, where he laid three days and three nights, yet longer, without food, and praying to the Great Spirit, until suppuration took place in the wound, and by the decaying of the flesh the weight was dropped, and the splint also, which he dare not extricate in another way. At the end of this, he crawled back to the village on his hands and knees, being too much emaciated to walk, and begged for something to eat, which was at once given him, and he was soon restored to health.

These extreme and difficult cases often occur, and I learn that in such instances the youth has it at his option to get rid of the weight that is thus left upon him, in such way as he may choose, and some of those modes are

796
881

far more extraordinary than the one which I have just named. Several of the Traders, who have been for a number of years in the habit of seeing this part of the ceremony, have told me that two years since, when they were looking on, there was one whose flesh on the arms was so strong that the weights could not be left, and he dragged them with his body to the river by the side of the village, where he set a stake fast in the ground on the top of the bank, and fastening cords to it, he let himself half-way down a perpendicular wall of rock, of twenty-five or thirty feet, where the weight of his body was suspended by the two cords attached to the flesh of his arms. In this awful condition he hung for several days, equi-distant from the top of the rock and the deep water below, into which he at last dropped and saved himself by swimming ashore!

I need record no more of these shocking and disgusting instances, of which I have already given enough to convince the world of the correctness of the established fact of the Indian's superior stoicism and power of endurance, although some recent writers have, from motives of envy, from ignorance, or something else, taken great pains to cut the poor Indian short in everything, and in *this*, even as if it were a virtue.

I am ready to accord to them in this particular, the palm; the credit of outdoing anything and everybody, and of enduring more than civilized man ever aspired to or ever thought of. My heart has sickened also with disgust for so abominable and ignorant a custom, and still I stand ready with all my heart, to excuse and forgive them for adhering so strictly to an ancient celebration, founded in superstitions and mysteries, of which they know not the origin, and constituting a material part and feature in the code and forms of their religion.

Reader, I will return with you a moment to the medicine-lodge, which is just to be closed, and then we will indulge in some general reflections upon what has passed, and in what, and for what purposes this strange batch of mysteries has been instituted and perpetuated.

After these young men, who had for the last four days occupied the medicine-lodge, had been operated on, in the manner above described, and taken out of it, the old medicine-man, master of ceremonies, returned, (still crying to the Great Spirit) sole tenant of that sacred place, and brought out the "edged tools," which I before said had been collected at the door of every man's wigwam, to be given as a sacrifice to the water, and leaving the lodge securely fastened, he approached the bank of the river, when all the medicine-men attended him, and all the nation were spectators; and in their presence he threw them from a high bank into very deep water, from which they cannot be recovered, and where they are, correctly speaking, made a sacrifice to the water. This part of the affair took place just exactly at sun-down, and closed the scene, being the end or finale of the *Mandan religious ceremony*.

000 *The reader will forgive me for here inserting the Certificates which I have just received from Mr Kipp, of the city of New York, and two others, who were with me; which I offer for the satisfaction of the world, who read the above account.*

> "*We hereby certify, that we witnessed, in company with Mr. Catlin, in the Mandan Village, the ceremonies represented in the four paintings, and described in his Notes, to which this Certificate refers; and that he has therein faithfully represented those scenes as we saw them transacted, without any addition or exaggeration.*
>
> "J. Kipp, *Agent Amer. Fur Company.*
> L. Crawford, *Clerk.*
> "*Mandan Village, July* 20, 1833. Abraham Bogard."

The strange country that I am in—its excitements—its accidents and wild incidents which startle me at almost every moment, prevent me from any very elaborate disquisition upon the above remarkable events at present; and even had I all the time and leisure of a country gentleman, and all the additional information which I am daily procuring, and daily expect to procure hereafter in explanation of these unaccountable mysteries, yet do I fear that there would be that inexplicable difficulty that hangs over most of the customs and traditions of these simple people, who have no history to save facts and systems from falling into the most absurd and disjointed fable and ignorant fiction.

What few plausible inferences I have as yet been able to draw from the above strange and peculiar transactions I will set forth, but with some diffidence, hoping and trusting that by further intimacy and familiarity with these people I may yet arrive at more satisfactory and important results.

1773 That these people should have a tradition of the Flood is by no means surprising; as I have learned from every tribe I have visited, that they all have some high mountain in their vicinity, where they insist upon it the big canoe landed; but that these people should hold an annual celebration of the event, and the season of that decided by such circumstances as the full leaf of the willow, and the medicine-lodge opened by such a man as Nu-mohk-muck-a-nah (who appears to be a white man), and making his appearance "from the high-mountains in the West;" and some other circumstances, is surely a very remarkable thing, and requires some extraordinary attention.

This Nu-mohk-muck-a-nah (first or only man) is undoubtedly some mystery or medicine-man of the tribe, who has gone out on the prairie on the evening previous, and having dressed and painted himself for the occasion, comes into the village in the morning, endeavouring to keep up the semblance of reality; for their tradition says, that at a very ancient period such a man did actually come from the West—that his body was of the white colour, as

[See pp. 159-61, cat. 116 — Analyst] A A

173 this man's body is represented—that he wore a robe of four white wolf skins—his head-dress was made of two raven's skins—and in his left hand was a huge pipe. He said, "he was at one time the only man—he told them of the destruction of every thing on the earth's surface by water—that he stopped in his *big canoe* on a high mountain in the West, where he landed and was saved."

"That the Mandans, and all other people were bound to make yearly sacrifices of some edged-tools to the water, for of such things the big canoe was made. That he instructed the Mandans how to build their medicine-lodge, and taught them also the forms of these annual ceremonies; and told them that as long as they made these sacrifices, and performed their rites to the full letter, they might be assured of the fact that they would be the favourite people of the Almighty, and would always have enough to eat and drink; and that so soon as they should depart in one tittle from these forms, they might be assured, that their race would decrease, and finally run out; and that they might date their nation's calamity to that omission or neglect."

These people have, no doubt, been long living under the dread of such an injunction, and in the fear of departing from it; and while they are living in total ignorance of its origin, the world must remain equally ignorant of much of its meaning, as they needs must be of all Indian customs resting on ancient traditions, which soon run into fables, having lost all their system, by which they might have been construed.

[17[illegible]] This strange and unaccountable custom, is undoubtedly peculiar to the Mandans; although, amongst the Minatarees, and some others of the neighbouring tribes, they have seasons of abstinence and self-torture, somewhat similar, but bearing no other resemblance to this than a mere feeble effort or form of imitation.

It would seem from their tradition of the willow branch, and the dove, that these people must have had some proximity to some part of the civilized world; or that missionaries or others have been formerly among them, inculcating the Christian religion and the Mosaic account of the Flood; which is, in this and some other respects, decidedly different from the theory which most natural people have distinctly established of that event.

There are other strong, and almost decisive proofs in my opinion, in support of the assertion, which are to be drawn from the diversity of colour in their hair and complexions, as I have before described, as well as from their tradition just related, of the "*first or only man*," whose body was white, and who came from the West, telling them of the destruction of the earth by water, and instructing them in the forms of these mysteries; and, in addition to the above, I will add the two following very curious stories, which I had from several of their old and dignified chiefs, and which are, no doubt, standing and credited traditions of the tribe.

"The Mandans (people of the pheasants) were the first people created in the world, and they originally lived inside of the earth; they raised many vines, and one of them had grown up through a hole in the earth, over head, and one of their young men climbed up it until he came out on the top of the ground, on the bank of the river, where the Mandan village stands. He looked around, and admired the beautiful country and prairies about him—saw many buffaloes—killed one with his bow and arrows, and found that its meat was good to eat. He returned, and related what he had seen; when a number of others went up the vine with him, and witnessed the same things. Amongst those who went up, were two very pretty young women, who were favourites of the chiefs, because they were virgins; and amongst those who were trying to get up, was a very large and fat woman, who was ordered by the chiefs not to go up, but whose curiosity led her to try it as soon as she got a secret opportunity, when there was no one present. When she got part of the way up, the vine broke under the great weight of her body, and let her down. She was very much hurt by the fall, but did not die. The Mandans were very sorry about this; and she was disgraced for being the cause of a very great calamity, which she had brought upon them, and which could never be averted; for no more could ever ascend, nor could those descend who had got up; but they built the Mandan village, where it formerly stood, a great ways below on the river; and the remainder of the people live under ground to this day."

The above tradition is told with great gravity by their chiefs and doctors or mystery-men; and the latter profess to hear their friends talk through the earth at certain times and places, and even consult them for their opinions and advice on many important occasions

The next tradition runs thus:—

"At a very ancient period, O-kee-hee-de (the Evil Spirit, the black fellow mentioned in the religious ceremonies) came to the Mandan village with Nu-mohk-muck-a-nah (the first or only man) from the West, and sat down by a woman who had but one eye, and was hoeing corn. Her daughter, who was very pretty came up to her, and the Evil Spirit desired her to go and bring some water; but wished that before she started, she would come to him and eat some buffalo meat. He told her to take a piece out of his side, which she did and ate it, which proved to be buffalo-fat. She then went for the water, which she brought, and met them in the village where they had walked, and they both drank of it—nothing more was done.

"The friends of the girl soon after endeavoured to disgrace her, by telling her that she was *encieate*, which she did not deny. She declared her innocence at the same time, and boldly defied any man in the village to come forward and accuse her. This raised a great excitement in the village, and as no one could stand forth to accuse her, she was looked upon as *great medicine*. She soon after went off secretly to the upper Mandan village, where the child was born.

"Great search was made for her before she was found; as it was expected

773 that the child would also be great *medicine* or mystery, and of great importance to the existence and welfare of the tribe. They were induced to this belief from the very strange manner of its conception and birth, and were soon confirmed in it from the wonderful things which it did at an early age. They say, that amongst other miracles which he performed, when the Mandans were like to starve, he gave them four buffalo bulls, which filled the whole village—leaving as much meat as there was before they had eaten; saying that these four bulls would supply them for ever. Nu-mohk-muck-a-nah (the first or only man) was bent on the destruction of the child, and after making many fruitless searches for it, found it hidden in a dark place, and put it to death by throwing it into the river.

"When O-kee-hee-de (the Evil Spirit) heard of the death of this child, he sought for Nu-mohk-muck-a-nah with intent to kill him. He traced him a long distance, and at length found him at *Heart River*, about seventy miles below the village, with the big medicine-pipe in his hand, the charm or mystery of which protects him from all of his enemies. They soon agreed, however, to become friends, smoked the big pipe together, and returned to the Mandan village. The Evil Spirit was satisfied; and Nu-mohk-muck-a-na told the Mandans never to pass Heart River to live, for it was the centre of the world, and to live beyond it would be destruction to them; and he named it *Nat-com-pa-sa-hah* (heart or centre of the world)."

Such are a few of the principal traditions of these people, which I have thought proper to give in this place, and I have given them in their own way, with all the imperfections and absurd inconsistencies which should be expected to characterize the history of all ignorant and superstitious people who live in a state of simple and untaught nature, with no other means of perpetuating historical events, than by oral traditions.

I advance these vague stories then, as I have done, and shall do in other instances, not in support of any theory, but merely as I have heard them related by the Indians; and preserved them, as I have everything else that I could meet in the Indian habits and character, for the information of the world, who may get more time to theorize than I have at present; and who may consider better than I can, how far such traditions should be taken as evidence of the facts, that these people have for a long period preserved and perpetuated an imperfect knowledge of the Deluge—of the appearance and death of a Saviour—and of the transgressions of mother Eve.

I am not yet able to learn from these people whether they have any distinct theory of the creation; as they seem to date nothing further back than their own existence as a people; saying (as I have before mentioned), that they were the first people created; involving the glaring absurdities that they were the only people on earth before the Flood, and the only one saved was a white man; or that they were created inside of the earth, as their tradition says; and that they did not make their appearance on its outer surface until after the Deluge. When an Indian story is told, it is 773 like all other gifts, "to be taken for what it is worth," and for any seeming inconsistency in their traditions there is no remedy; for as far as I have tried to reconcile them by reasoning with, or questioning them, I have been entirely defeated; and more than that, have generally incurred their distrust and ill-will. One of the Mandan doctors told me very gravely a few days since, that the earth was a large tortoise, that it carried the dirt on its back—that a tribe of people, who are now dead, and whose faces were white, used to dig down very deep in this ground to catch *badgers;* and that one day they stuck a knife through the tortoise-shell, and it sunk down so that the water ran over its back, and drowned all but one man. And on the next day while I was painting his portrait, he told me there were *four tortoises,*—one in the North—one in the East—one in the South, and one in the West; that each one of these rained ten days, and the water covered over the earth.

These ignorant and conflicting accounts, and both from the same man, give as good a demonstration, perhaps, of what I have above mentioned, as to the inefficiency of Indian traditions as anything I could at present mention. They might, perhaps, have been in this instance however the creeds of different sects, or of different priests amongst them, who often advance diametrically opposite theories and traditions relative to history and mythology.

And however ignorant and ridiculous they may seem, they are yet worthy of a little further consideration, as relating to a number of curious circumstances connected with the unaccountable religious ceremonies which I have just described

The Mandan chiefs and doctors, in all their feasts, where the pipe is lit 782 and about to be passed around, deliberately propitiate the good-will and 788 favour of the Great Spirit, by extending the stem of the pipe *upwards* before they smoke it themselves; and also as deliberately and as strictly offering the stem to the four *cardinal points* in succession, and then drawing a whiff through it, passing it around amongst the group.

The *annual religious ceremony* invariably lasts *four* days, and the other 796 following circumstances attending these strange forms, and seeming to have 801 some allusion to the *four* cardinal points, or the "four tortoises," seem to me to be worthy of further notice. *Four* men are selected by Nu-mohk-muck-a-nah (as I have before said), to cleanse out and prepare the medicine-lodge for the occasion—one he calls from the *north* part of the village—one from the *east*—one from the *south*, and one from the *west*. The *four* sacks of water, in form of large tortoises, resting on the floor of the lodge and before described, would seem to be typical of the same thing; and also the *four* buffalo, and the *four* human skulls resting on the floor of the same lodge—the *four* couples of dancers in the "bull-dance," as before described; and also the *four* intervening dancers in the same dance, and also described.

796 801 The bull-dance in front of the medicine-lodge, repeated on the *four* days, is danced *four* times on the first day, *eight* times on the second, *twelve* times on the third, and *sixteen* times on the *fourth ;* (adding *four* dances on each of the *four* days,) which added together make *forty*, the exact number of days that it rained upon the earth, according to the Mosaic account, to produce the Deluge. There are *four* sacrifices of black and blue cloths erected over the door of the medicine-lodge—the visits of Oh-kee-hee-de (or Evil Spirit) were paid to *four* of the buffaloes in the buffalo-dance, as above described; and in every instance, the young men who underwent the tortures before explained, had *four* splints or skewers run through the flesh on their legs—*four* through the arms and *four* through the body.

000 Such is a brief account of these strange scenes which I have just been witnessing, and such my brief history of the Mandans. I might write much more on them, giving yet a volume on their stories and traditions; but it would be a volume of fables, and scarce worth recording. A nation of Indians in their primitive condition, where there are no historians, have but a temporary historical existence, for the reasons above advanced, and their history, what can be certainly learned of it, may be written in a very small compass.

I have dwelt longer on the history and customs of these people than I have or shall on any other tribe, in all probability, and that from the fact that I have found them a very peculiar people, as will have been seen by my notes.

From these very numerous and striking peculiarities in their personal appearance—their customs—traditions and language, I have been led conclusively to believe that they are a people of decidedly a different origin from that of any other tribe in these regions.

From these reasons, as well as from the fact that they are a small and feeble tribe, against whom the powerful tribe of Sioux are waging a deadly war with the prospect of their extermination; and who with their limited numbers, are not likely to hold out long in their struggle for existence, I have taken more pains to pourtray their whole character, than my limited means will allow me to bestow upon other tribes.

From the ignorant and barbarous and disgusting customs just recited, the world would naturally infer, that these people must be the most cruel and inhuman beings in the world—yet, such is not the case, and it becomes my duty to say it; a better, more honest, hospitable and kind people, as a community, are not to be found in the world. No set of men that ever I associated with have better hearts than the Mandans, and none are quicker to embrace and welcome a white man than they are—none will press him closer to his bosom, that the pulsation of his heart may be felt, than a Mandan; and no man in any country will keep his word and guard his honour more closely.

The shocking and disgusting custom that I have just described, sickens the heart and even the stomach of a traveller in the country, and he weeps 000 for their ignorance—he pities them with all his heart for their blindness, and laments that the light of civilization, of agriculture and religion cannot be extended to them, and that their hearts which are good enough, could not be turned to embrace something more rational and conducive to their true happiness.

Many would doubtless ask, whether such a barbarous custom could be eradicated from these people? and whether their thoughts and tastes, being turned to agriculture and religion, could be made to abandon the dark and random channel in which they are drudging, and made to flow in the light and life of civilization?

To this query I answer *yes*. Although this is a custom of long standing, being a part of their religion; and probably valued as one of their dearest rights; and notwithstanding the difficulty of making inroads upon the religion of a people in whose country there is no severence of opinions, and consequently no division into different sects, with different creeds to shake their faith; I still believe, and I *know*, that by a judicious and persevering effort, this abominable custom, and others, might be extinguished, and the beautiful green fields about the Mandan village might be turned into productive gardens, and the waving green bluffs that are spread in the surrounding distance, might be spotted with lowing kine, instead of the sneaking wolves and the hobbled war-horses that are now stalking about them.

All ignorant and superstitious people, it is a well-known fact, are the most fixed and stubborn in their religious opinions, and perhaps the most difficult to divert from their established belief, from the very fact that they are the most difficult to reason with. Here is an ignorant race of human beings, who have from time immemorial been in the habit of worshipping in their own way, and of enjoying their religious opinions without ever having heard any one to question their correctness; and in those opinions they are quiet and satisfied, and it requires a patient, gradual, and untiring effort to convince such a people that they are wrong, and to work the desired change in their belief, and consequently in their actions.

It is decidedly my opinion, however, that such a thing *can* be done, and I do not believe there is a race of wild people on earth where the experiment could be more successfully made than amongst the kind and hospitable Mandans, nor any place where the Missionary labours of pious and industrious men would be more sure to succeed, or more certain to be rewarded in the world to come.

I deem such a trial of patience and perseverance with these people of great importance, and well worth the experiment. One which I shall hope soon to see accomplished, and which, if properly conducted, I am sure will result in success. Severed as they are from the contaminating and counteracting vices which oppose and thwart most of the best efforts of the Missionaries along the frontier, and free from the almost fatal prejudices which they have there to contend with; they present a better field for the labours of such benevolent teachers than they have yet worked in, and a far better chance than they have yet had of proving to the world that the poor Indian is not a brute—that he is a human and humane being, that he is capable of improvement—and that his mind is a beautiful blank on which anything can be written if the proper means be taken.

The Mandans being but a small tribe, of two thousand only, and living all in two villages, in sight of each other, and occupying these permanently, without roaming about like other neighbouring tribes, offer undoubtedly, the best opportunity for such an experiment of any tribe in the country. The land about their villages is of the best quality for ploughing and grazing, and the water just such as would be desired. Their villages are fortified with piquets or stockades, which protect them from the assaults of their enemies at home; and the introduction of agriculture (which would supply them with the necessaries and luxuries of life, without the necessity of continually exposing their lives to their more numerous enemies on the plains, when they are seeking in the chase the means of their subsistence) would save them from the continual wastes of life, to which, in their wars and the chase they are continually exposed, and which are calculated soon to result in their extinction.

I deem it not folly nor idle to say that these people *can be saved*, nor officious to suggest to some of the very many excellent and pious men, who are almost throwing away the best energies of their lives along the debased frontier, that if they would introduce the ploughshare and their prayers amongst these people, who are so far separated from the taints and contaminating vices of the frontier, they would soon see their most ardent desires accomplished and be able to solve to the world the perplexing enigma, by presenting a nation of savages, civilized and christianized (and consequently *saved*), in the heart of the American wilderness.